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THE ANCHORED  
HEART

A BRITTANY ISLAND

DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

*by Ida Treat*

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

*P*  
*hb*

NEW YORK

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TO MY CAPTAIN

Thanks are due to the editors of  
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# THE ANCHORED HEART

*"The paths to the House I seek to make  
But leave to those to come, the House itself"*

## INTRODUCTION: *Cœur à l'Ancre*

I HAVE never felt that the house belongs to me. When I say "my house," "my house in Brittany," I am conscious of mis-statement. It can only be a figure of speech, or worse—a concession to what is usually understood by "ownership" and the relation of the buyer to what he buys. I did buy the house and I own the title deed, but that is all I can honestly say I own. If the house belongs to anyone, it belongs to itself. It also belongs to the island, like the granite it stands on and of which it is built. As for me, I belong to the house.

I made the discovery all at once, the first time I saw it. That happened one morning in late March, fourteen years ago. I had climbed the steep path to the Semaphore that stands on the highest part of the island—a square white tower with a signal-mast at its top, and in the lee of its east wall, slabs of water-worn granite where neighbors gather on summer nights to watch the lights flash in from the horizon: Les Héaux, les

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Roches Douvres, La Oraine, and close at hand, the lazy beam of our own Rosédo and the still, gold eye of the Paon . . .

It was a tumultuous spring morning, with slate-blue clouds and slanting rain-sheets driving across the mainland. Above the island, the sky hung sheer and cloudless, but the March sun had a stormy sting that set the meadows steaming; and as I climbed, the Semaphore ran up squall signals—two black cones.

It was hot on the path, after the three-mile walk from the island port, and the memory of a sleepless night in the train from Paris tugged like a weight at my heels. It had been a cheerful night, though anything but restful, with six jolly sailors in the compartment returning to Brest after duty in Toulon. They had given me a sailor's welcome, helped me with my bags and offered me all four corners of the compartment at once with competitive politeness. After that, they removed and carefully folded their blue sailor collars, stacked their blue berets with the red pompon in the rack, and getting out sandwiches and bottles of red wine, prepared to make a night of it. When I left them at Guingamp eight hours later, they were still singing, though damply, and the original key of the song was multiplied by six.

*Giboulée, giboulà—on dit qu'elle est ma-la-de,  
Giboulée, giboulà—on dit qu'elle en mourr-a!*

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That should have told me they were Bretons, but I had never been to Brittany before; it was the first time I heard the air. The men spoke Breton; to my unaccustomed ears, it had an outlandish sound and, with it all, traits that were oddly familiar—sibilant *s's* and jerky inflections. I might have imagined I was listening to a parody of English, or a conversation in English or German heard through a wall. It was a curious sensation, not to understand a word. For this was France where I had lived for years. It made me feel forlorn and far away.

Shivering on the station platform at five in the morning, while I waited for the little train that was to take me to the coast, I came near regretting I had come—at least to the extent of asking myself what had made me interrupt my trip to Carnac with a stop-over at an unknown island.

That morning, the sea was hidden. Thick fog blanketed the landscape at daybreak. From the train that rattled towards the coast through the woods above a tidal river, I could see nothing but drenched pine branches with now and then a glimpse of gray mud flats. When I reached the port on the mainland, the fog had thickened to a smoky drizzle that masked the town completely. I could distinguish nothing but shiny wet cobbles, blurred outlines of roofs and over by the harbor, a dim spider-web of masts and rigging.

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Three miles by bus over sunken country lanes brought me to a spot where the road ended and glistening slabs of a causeway led off into the mist. There, at last, I met the familiar smell of the sea. It came at a blast—the tang of seaweed, uncovered rocks and salty sand stretches—while the damp wind burrowed restlessly through the mist and unseen gulls screamed shrilly overhead. A launch bobbed in the choppy waves at the end of the causeway. A man in oilskins stood waiting at the wheel, bronzed and blue-eyed, with beads of mist frosting his eyebrows and mustache.

"We'll soon be out of the fog," he promised, as we swung away from the pier.

It is five miles across the Narrows from the mainland. We had not covered half the distance when the mist grew luminous as steam, thinned into tatters and suddenly was gone. We shot into the sun and there, straight ahead, lay the island beyond a choppy stretch of gray-green water.

The first sight was a disappointment: a low green saddle, with two box-like buildings, presumably hotels, in the hollow; and on either height, bunches of pines, and here and there a villa. That disappointment at the outset distorted my whole first picture of the island. I did not realize at the time that I approached it, so to speak, by the back door. Not a fishing boat in the tiny harbor; only a launch or two moored to buoys, and

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pleasure craft on stilts, shrouded in tarpaulins. The buildings in the hollow proved to be hotels of no particular architecture, and the houses on the hill, half hidden among pines and eucalyptus, were, as I had suspected, shuttered villas. I even saw a palm or two, and nestled against a wall, a whole thicket of mimosa. Palms and mimosa—on the north shore of Brittany! The sight of them made my winter coat weigh heavier on my shoulders in the March sun. I had come prepared for a northern climate, not for the Côte d'Azur. I had yet to learn that to islanders this *was* the Midi, the sheltered South, a playground for summer visitors. Three miles away lay the "North"—the Atlantic coast, with a climate and a population of its own. The friends I came to visit lived in the North, "near the Semaphore," according to the sailor on the launch. From the heights above the port I saw its square white tower in the distance, perched on another green hill.

Crossing the island was like crossing France in miniature. After the southern gardens came the metropolis, a village of granite cottages, with its shops, church and graveyard, and a square beneath tall plane trees. Then meadows, starred with pink daisies and knots of yellow primrose, brown fields and blades of wheat just showing, and long rows of potato plants already in leaf. The path led on through a labyrinth of granite walls, above which rose here and there a roof of thatch or slate. It

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gave a sharp turn and skirted a little bay, a stretch of mud and sand, for the tide was out. Beyond the bay lay more meadows, more walls and roofs; last of all the Semaphore on its hill, with the two black storm-cones high on the signal staff.

It was a steep pull up the hill. I remember I made a wide detour to avoid two black-and-white cows tugging at their tethers in a circle of cropped grass. They stick in my memory, the way silly and irrelevant details always do, on the border of some particularly moving experience. At the top of the hill I encountered the wind, a terrific blast, the forerunner of the squall, tearing across the bare rocks, massed storm clouds in its wake. It brought me up standing, like an invisible wall. And there at last was the sea.

I was totally unprepared for what I saw. Twice since, I have known that feeling. Once, at sunrise in Peking, when I opened the shutters of my hotel window and saw the gold roofs of the Forbidden City floating on a mist of bare tree-tops, against the background of the snow-capped Western Hills. And again, only a short time ago, from the terrace of a New York penthouse, as I looked down on the East River between the black arcs of two bridges, with that incredible mountain of Manhattan towering into the sky at the right. Each time, I sensed that same transparent wall, like a barrier to some immense discovery. Everyone can count

such moments, perhaps two or three in a lifetime. That March morning, "*This* must be Brittany," I said, and between two gusts, walked on across the hilltop as if I were treading on glass.

Beyond the hilltop stretched the moor, overgrown with heather, brakes and gorse, with not a tree to break its sweep. To the right a little lighthouse sat among the heather, and over by the sea, rocks like the tops of buried mountains rose out of the soil to form a mighty wall. Some, still underground, showed only a rounded flank above the green; others had shaken off the earth and stood erect, split and scarred like crags in miniature.

Over it all spring lay like an enchantment. The gorse had flowered; its hot bloom covered the moor with a yellow blanket. The brakes were pushing up through the matted grass, sturdy wrists with crinkled fern-leaf hands held in against the stem. Pools of blue hyacinths lay among the rocks and violets clustered in the moss, bedded among thousands of tiny stars. Out beyond, checkered with patches of light, was the ocean, watery green by the shore, and purple-black at the sky-line. The wind had dropped, the last lull before the squall. Suddenly I realized that it was very still. I was drinking in that stillness when a cuckoo shouted from a rock—and I saw the house.

It was so much a part of the landscape that I had

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not noticed it before. Gray as the rocks, it might have been a rock itself, that by some miracle of growth had shouldered off the earth that hid it, pushing up slowly to the light, like the brakes in the spring soil. From where I stood, I could see only the gray roof with a sturdy chimney at either end, and the tops of three windows, just visible above a garden wall. Half house, half fortress, it turned a shoulder to the wind and hugged its garden to its breast, behind granite walls. So I first saw it, and so it stood when I stopped on the path one day last November and looked back, for perhaps the last time. Massive and gray in the evening light, on the moor where the gorse was putting out its second flowers and the brakes had turned to bronze. Nothing to show that fourteen years had been added to its history—and another European war.

It did not occur to me, as I walked down the path from the Semaphore that first morning on the island, that the house was expecting me. Yet the squall caught me at the gate and the gate was open. In fact, there was no gate, only a gap in the wall and a few rotten boards clinging to the hinges. I saw at first glance that the house was empty, but its low doorway, deep cut in the stone, offered a shelter from the rain. While the southwest wind drove it past in flying sheets, wedged in my dry corner, I looked at the garden.

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It was almost a rock garden, bordered everywhere with granite. A sunken path led down from the gate to the doorway between low walls. More low walls ran parallel to the house-front, holding back the earth, for the house sat lower than the garden. And still more walls held in a terrace with lilacs growing along one end, while shutting it in on all sides, ran the main wall of the garden, with only the sky showing above.

For a neglected garden, there were few weeds—indeed almost the only “weeds” were flowers: pink-belled shamrock and those orange-gold calendulas the French call “worries.” They had sprung up everywhere, sturdy as dandelions, forming gay beds on either side the path and jostling the yellow gillyflowers and ferns that grew in clefts of the wall. A shiny-leaved rose bush had spread to a ragged hedge along the path, and another climbed to the eaves, where it sent off long trailers that whipped in the wind.

Most abandoned houses look forlorn. Not this. All it needed was a gardener’s shears on the rose bush, a few trowels of mortar between the stones, a fresh coat of green paint on the door. When the rain stopped, I peered through the windows, their eight panes intact behind wrought iron bars. The main room was like a ship’s cabin with its beamed and blackened ceiling, its built-in beds and cupboards, the old clock-case wedged against the chimney. The new tenant would only have

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to add a plate-rack on the wall, a wood-box under it, a table and two benches, to feel at home.

He would be a sea captain, I thought. What a place to come home to, after the foggy Banks or the still black currents around Iceland! But that was nonsense; the days of quarterdecks were over. The "captain" would look down on the sea from the bridge of a liner, on the China run, perhaps, or the route to Madagascar and the South Seas. Probably he would have a flat in Marseilles or Le Havre and come here for summer vacations. My imagination was trotting.

In the other room there would be more to do: a partition to take out, a big window to cut in the north wall facing the sea, perhaps a stone fireplace to replace the wooden one. . . . I was playing a game, and every second it grew more earnest. Low bookcases, a couch by the stairway. Chairs—rustic Louis XV with wide straw seats (I even pictured the captain's armchair by the window) and curtains the color of the calendulas in the garden, so it would always look as if the sun were shining. I had just decided that the rough plaster, too, must be tinted when steps sounded behind me on the path and I turned to face a woman.

She wore a man's coat and sabots, a shapeless hat on her tight-bound hair, and carried a coil of rope and a wooden mallet. A woman in her late forties, with a vigorous peasant body, suntanned cheeks and forehead,

a decided little mouth and chin and wide-set, humorous dark eyes.

"I was going to change the cows and I saw you from the gate," she said. "Are you going to buy the house?"

There, in words, was the thought that had been lurking all the time at the back of my mind while I played with my idea of a sea captain on a holiday. As she spoke, I was suddenly, physically, aware of the house behind me. I actually *felt* it, massive stone against my back, its feet firm on the rock. Here was something solid at last, a refuge for wanderers other than sea captains. Like some great friendly animal it gripped me in its granite paws and held me fast. Over my head it spoke the answer.

The woman came closer and held out her hand.

"*Tant mieux,*" she said heartily. "I am Marie Lebras from the farm across the lane. It will be good to have neighbors here again."

And that was how I did not go to Carnac, and how all in one morning I acquired a house and a friend. Of Marie Lebras—Marie-Anaik to her friends—much will be said later on, for she is as much a part of the house as she is a part of the island. I might almost say she *is* the island—and more than that. Viewed from across the Atlantic, with the perspective of the years,

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her figure takes on added dignity and grows to heroic size. She is France.

From Marie-Anaik I learned something of the history of the house, though she could tell me little beyond the fact that it was old—part of it went back three hundred years, people said. And there had been at least one sea captain in its past: old Captain D—— who added the top story about the middle of the last century. He had gone down with his ship a few years later, but his wife had lived on there for years with an old servant. At that point in her story, Marie-Anaik said a curious thing.

“Old Madame D—— did not die here. Nobody dies here. It is a lucky house.”

I often pondered that remark.

Captain D—— and his family had been the last real tenants. Sometimes, the heirs rented it for a season to summer visitors, but most of the time it stayed empty. In the World War it served as a post for French soldiers.

I asked Marie-Anaik if the house had a name. Every house on the island and almost every rock is named. She said there was a name associated with the house—Ker-an-Guilis, the house (or place) of the church. Some people said the name did not belong exclusively to the house; it included the neighborhood, the four or five houses on the slope below the Semaphore. She

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had no idea how the name originated. If a church once stood there, it must have been centuries ago; no one had ever heard of it.

Yvonne, old Captain D——'s granddaughter, could only repeat what Marie-Anaik had told me. She, too, thought the name belonged to the "village."

"But why don't you call it Ker-an-Guilis, anyway?" she advised. "Later on, if you want to, you can find another name."

It was odd that Yvonne should have turned out to be Captain D——'s granddaughter and part owner of the house. I had known her in Paris; indeed, she was the friend I had so casually stopped to visit on my way to Carnac.

The house eventually found a name. It even found me a sea captain of my own, and it was he who named the house: a name that will never appear on letter-heads or one of those brass plates summer visitors like to nail to the gates of their villas. It is part of the house's secret, though the island carpenter may have had some hint of it when he chose a design for the loopholes he cut in each of the new shutters. But all that came long afterwards, when I had found out the meaning of Marie-Anaik's strange remark that troubled me so often.

Three times in fourteen years death struck at the house: two telegrams and once the glassy voice of a

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radio announcer saying, "Late last night, suddenly in Paris . . ." That time it struck so close the old house rocked on its foundations. Yet no one died there. A "lucky house."

Today we are exiles: Yvonne, on the other side of the world, the Captain somewhere on the sea, still fighting for France that will someday be free, and I, here in America, which, try as I may, can never be truly home, because of a house on a Brittany island that I may never see again . . . a house two of us call *Cœur à l'Ancre*, The Anchored Heart.

## I. Wreckage

WHEN an islander goes to bed, he begins by closing the "hatches." His house is a ship, and the night, the sea. All must be tight while the master sleeps. In the old days, he cut his windows like portholes and took his dose of wind and rain and sunlight during the "deck watch." When he went "below," he liked to feel snug.

Not being a sailor, and only an islander by adoption, I keep my shutters open day and night, with a little iron shepherdess in eighteenth-century paniers, pompadour and tilted hat, braced against each of them to hold them fast. The paint stays a bright garden green on the side next the wall, but in one season the exposed boards bleach out to gray. Alain Lebras, when he gives the shutters a fresh coat of paint in the spring, never fails to tell me how foolish I was to have them made.

"Shutters are meant to shut," he says severely. "If

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you don't use them, it's a waste of money." But Marie-Anaik thinks as I do, that the green boards add a gay note to the gray wall. She never closes them, even when we are away.

"A shut-up house feels lonesome. Houses need to be lived in," she says.

Sometimes on stormy nights when I first came to the island, I let myself be tempted and shut the blinds on the north window. But the two hearts cut at the top of the panels were like pale eyes peering in, and the beam from the Héaux Light lit them with evil flashes. Ordinarily, the light was a friendly thing. I could see it from my bed, across ten miles of water. Four . . . five . . . , four . . . five . . . , good . . . night . . . , good . . . night . . . , it flashed. All the while our own little light, only two hundred yards away, sent its paler beam dancing across the garden. I could almost feel it stroke the wall behind my head.

It was the first of June, 1939. The lights had gone to bed. Broad day outside—not a trace of pink in the northern sky, though it was still very early. Morning comes betimes in summer on the forty-eighth parallel, the latitude of Newfoundland. Still weather: the breeze sent little tremors up and down the curtains, but was powerless to stir them. Straining my ears, I could just catch a faraway *s-s-h* of pebbles rubbing on

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the beach of Pors-a-pren. Yet it was more a sensation than a sound. That incredible stillness; whenever I grew aware of it, it brought the same delight. It made waking a leisurely drifting up to consciousness, without a jar. You slid into the day as quietly as the dawn comes in those northern waters: a little grayness, a spreading light, then, lifting imperceptibly, the sun.

That morning there was no conscious delight in waking. Rather, an ill-defined heaviness, a sense of futility, as if at the outset the day had lost its purpose. It was just another day. I was aware of it even before I opened my eyes. The Captain had returned to the sea.

Every sailor's wife knows the feeling. Even Alice Bozec, who says two weeks a year is enough for any man to be at home ("You're glad when they come, and gladder yet when they go"), admits it takes her at least a day to readjust herself to "a life of peace" when her man leaves for Brest to join his ship.

It is not only the actual parting and the consciousness of all the torn ends that must be gathered up and knit together. There goes with it the inevitable feeling of revolt at the absurdity of a way of life in which only the holidays are important. One dot of reality for all the drab, everyday dashes. Though Marie-Anaik claims that sailors' marriages are nearly always happy ones. "People don't have time to know they've made a mistake."

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I lay thinking: By now he is in Paris. In an hour he will board the train for Marseilles. And tomorrow: "Slack lines . . . cast off!" In the shipping news, "The *Joffre* clears at noon for Port Said, Djibouti and ports east." Only a day ago, we were fishing off the Chandelier Rock, lazy in the sun, with the feeling of days and days before us. It was always like that: the pretense that the holiday would go on forever, even though at that very minute the signaler at the Semaphore might be noting down the telegram he always delivered with a regretful, "*Que voulez-vous, Madame, c'est la vie.*" It was not *his* life. He stayed at the Semaphore with his wife and brood from one year's end to the other, though he wore a blue uniform and was listed as a sailor. No message called him away after a few short weeks ashore. He could afford to be sympathetic. Though perhaps he longed for a holiday—at sea—and envied the Captain. "*Que voulez-vous, c'est la vie.*"

This time, the Captain's leave had lasted longer than usual. Three full months ashore—the fourth part of a year! "And a lucky thing I took it when I did," André had remarked when he read the summons. "In another three months there may be no leave for anyone." Always that cloud on the horizon. It hung like a shadow over each departure, and made each new return a victory. It would be nearly three months before the Cap-

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tain's ship would drop anchor again alongside the Pinède pier. In three months many things might happen. It was no longer the fear of personal catastrophe. What threatened now loomed vaster than sickness, death or shipwreck.

The day before, as the launch had swung away from the island pier, a gust of wind unfurled the flag. It stood out stiffly, a rectangle of blue, white and red, hiding the waving figures in the stern. When it dropped, I could no longer distinguish the Captain from the other passengers. Was it an omen? Somehow, I could not bring myself to laugh at the fancy. I had become as superstitious as any sailor's wife.

Somewhere overhead a lark was singing, a tiny dot of music poised on whirring wings. Why hunt for bad omens? There were surely good ones, too. From the room below came a husky whirr; the clock by the chimney cleared its throat and spoke eight times, its deep voice flattened by age. Then came a scratching at my door. First a scratch, then a discreet whine, then silence. Then more whines; at last a whole crescendo of whines, barks and scratchings. It was A-you, the Briard sheepdog, and her way of reminding me that life still goes on, that breakfast has to be got and hungry dogs fed, even when war-clouds threaten and one man's going robs a house of more than half its soul.

There was the garden, too. I remembered it with a

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pang. I had neglected the garden for weeks. Clumps of couch-grass poked up their wiry blades among the leeks; the nasturtiums had straggled down the wall and sent rows of sturdy green parasols in among the feathery carrot-tops; the asters needed transplanting. It was time I got Alain Lebras to scrape the paths again and cut the grass on the north terrace. He would complain as always that he had no time: he had not finished digging the early potatoes, the hay was spoiling to be cut and everybody wanted him for their gardens. And I would tell him how sorry I was to bother him and would make the customary suggestion about getting young 'Zeph Goaster to do the job. Before night-fall the grass on the terrace would be cropped to the roots and the paths swept bare. Alain, on his knees by the row of currant bushes, industriously rooting out handfuls of untidy grass, would call to me the usual "I found an hour. One of these young fellows would have taken half a day!"

Looking across the gardens from the north window, I thought I recognized Alain's long-armed silhouette on the rocks over by the sea. At high tide, Alain always finds time to "go pirating," as he says, to make the rounds of the north shore hunting for driftwood. The sea is Alain's lumberyard; I have never seen the court of the farm without a crazy pile of crates, logs, timbers and splintered planks. Alain points with pride

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to his hen house and tool shed, and the covered bins where he keeps potatoes. They didn't cost him a centime, he says, only what he paid for a few handfuls of nails. "And they look it," Marie-Anaik tells him. She does not share her husband's passion for getting something for nothing. Marie-Anaik would prefer a neat courtyard, free of all that clutter; and solid stone sheds instead of the ramshackle wooden ones. "Heaven knows there are plenty of stones." But Alain has the old wrecker instinct in his blood. That, and the memory of a poverty-ridden childhood when the wages of a laborer on an island farm, fifteen francs a month, could not keep nine small children in bread, and when farmers' wives, who handed a slice or two to the begging brood, never failed to say: "You're welcome to that, but don't come again soon!" To Alain Lebras, a penny spent is throwing open the door to want, and what you can get for nothing, a gift of God.

When I called at Marie-Anaik's for the milk that morning, she said something to me in an undertone as she bent over the milk-pail. I caught only the words "barrel" and "that one," the expression she generally uses when referring to her husband. I did not ask her to repeat her remark, for Amélie the seamstress sat on the bench by the table, her ears alert under her black bonnet. Amélie is our village news sheet, and to tell anything to Amélie is like having it drummed on

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the town square. She wore her "head-wind" face and gave me a more than usually thin-lipped "*Bonjour, Madame,*" which meant trouble for someone. Then she went on with the tale I had interrupted.

" . . . And when he caught sight of me, he stepped into the stable, but one of the pails slopped over and I saw what was in them. When I got to the kitchen, there was Ya-ya setting out the bottles. I told her she'd get into trouble if she wasn't careful."

"Oh, she'll be careful enough," Marie-Anaik said calmly. "And there won't be any trouble, unless somebody's tongue is too long."

"Now, Marie-Anaik, you know such things always get about. That's what I said to Ya-ya. I said I wouldn't take a drop of the stuff myself, not even to oblige her."

Amélie got up from the bench and stroked down the folds of her full black skirt. "I'll just leave my pitcher here and stop for it on the way back. It won't be long, I'm afraid, not the way things looked last night." She heaved a gusty sigh and settled her face into the same prim folds as her skirt. "Mère is very low," she said in a mournful tone, turning to me. "I've just been to the Semaphore to telegraph her nephew. We can't have the funeral before Friday; that will give him time enough to get here."

"That's Amélie, burying people before they're

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dead,'" Marie-Anaik said testily when the seamstress had taken her black bonnet out of the kitchen.  
"Though I'm afraid she's right about Mère. The poor soul is eighty-nine, you know."

In addition to being the local news sheet, Amélie is our death-bed specialist, and incidentally, the best nurse on our end of the island. She has her good points, Marie-Anaik admits, "but all the same, I'd have to be pretty far gone before I'd let her into my house. She'd know every sheet I've got in the cupboard before she left, which is almost more than I could tell you myself."

"What was her story about pails and bottles?"

Marie-Anaik wiped the last drop of milk from the oak table and sat down facing me on the bench.

"Don't tell me you haven't heard? A ship went aground off les Roches Douvres, probably in last week's storm. She's had time to break up by now; the tides are washing in her cargo, wine casks from Algeria or Spain. One came ashore yesterday in the east. Alain found another this morning at Pors-a-pren."

"Why all this secrecy?" I asked. "Haven't you a right to what you find?" Marie-Anaik shook her head.

"Not if the casks are whole. In that case, you're supposed to turn them over to the customs officer, who auctions them off and gives you nothing but 'salvage,' ten to twenty per cent of what the sale brings in.

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Wreckage of any value belongs to the state. But in this case—" Marie-Anaik's eyes crinkled—"I have an idea that the casks won't be whole, at least not when the customs officer hears of them."

"Are they big ones?"

"Six hundred liters. Kergazec, who found the first, has been peddling the stuff all night. All the neighbors—the tight-mouthed ones—got their share. But now that Amélie has wind of it, the news will be all over the island by noon. I think we'd better warn Alain before the *garde-maritime* comes over to investigate."

I followed Marie-Anaik down one of the sunken trails that lead across the moor to the shore where they meet the path that skirts the rocks. We call the latter the "smugglers' path" or the "customs path"; in the old days there was justification for both names. Worn by centuries of sabots, the trails cut sharp trenches through the heather, so narrow one might fancy the *korriganes* had made them, hopping on one foot, as legend says these strange little creatures do.

On either side the path, the brakes reached up above our shoulders among higher clumps of spiny gorse. In our narrow trench we were all but invisible. "A good place to hide from bombers," I remarked. Marie-Anaik frowned over her shoulder. "They'll never come to the island," she said shortly, but I no-

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ticed her voice had a troubled ring. A few steps more and she paused. "Maybe I'm crazy, but I just can't get it through my head such things can happen again. It always seems to me that people everywhere must be alike: I never saw anyone yet that wanted a war. Maybe the Germans are different, but something tells me they're like you and me—they've got no say." A few steps farther, then, "You can't tell me a German mother wants to send her boy a-soldiering. It's against nature."

She trotted ahead, and I knew she was thinking of Yves, her youngest, seventeen and already an old sailor. He too would be off for China on the Captain's ship. And in three months—

Marie-Anaik stopped again. This time she was smiling.

"Look," she said. "Here's some of Alain's work."

She stepped aside from the path, lifted the thick curtain of ferns and pointed. A heavy oak timber lay snug among the heather, its sides mottled with sea water and crusts of drying salt. "He'll come for it with his barrow after dark, if one of the neighbors doesn't find it and cart it home. That's the only way they can pick up anything along this shore. Alain doesn't leave them a stick of kindling."

Below the rocks by the sea we heard voices. From where we stood, we could look back to the Semaphore

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on its hill, keeping watch over the island and all that passes out at sea. But between island and sea is a rocky no-man's land, hidden below the cliffs that border the shore. To that, the Semaphore is blind.

Wedged in among the worn boulders in the shadow of the cliff stood the cask, looking like a boulder itself, or some stranded sea-creature, red-brown and monstrous, with swollen belly. About it squatted three men, one in a blue uniform, with a visored cap pushed off his forehead. On the cap a gold anchor glinted in the sun. Marie-Anaik's face fell. "The *garde-maritime!*" she murmured.

But Alain Lebras looked anything but crestfallen. Straddling the rocks, he greeted us with a shout.

"It's busted!"

The third figure, a little old man of the sea, in scaly blue trousers and with a beard like seaweed, got to his feet and piped an excited echo, "It's busted . . . yes, it's busted!" ("That Séverin—has to put his oar in everywhere," Marie-Anaik muttered.) The guard on his rock wagged his official head and spoke benignly: "Ya, one whole end stove in. Six hundred liters gone to feed the shrimps."

The damp air reeked of wine. It steeped the sides of the cask, slithered in trickles down the granite and dyed the rock pools a troubled purple. Yet the big cask, I noticed, sat upright among the rocks and only

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the top was splintered. Alain ran his hand along the rim and sucked his fingers.

"It's half full of sea-water. Bah!" He spat disgustedly.

Marie-Anaik sniffed.

"Monkey-tricks. *Ya*, there's a whole oceanful of sea outside, but it hasn't leaked into the cask, nor into their gullets. Look at that guard, red as a cock, thinking we don't see the bottle under his jacket. . . . Don't drink any salt water, Jean-Louis," she called. "It will give you the colic."

The guard grinned foolishly and parried: "What tells you I don't need a purge?"

As for Alain Lebras, unabashed, he went on with the comedy.

"He says I can keep the cask. It's not worth anything. Maybe I'll saw off the top and use it for a rain-barrel."

The guard got to his feet, pulled his jacket taut over a suspicious-looking welt under his left arm-pit, gave Alain a resounding slap on the shoulders and clambered up the bank. "Next time, find a whole one, so I'll get something for my walk," he called from the path.

"As though he wouldn't get his share of this—and a bellyful to start with," Marie-Anaik completed. We sat down on the edge of the grass, while below us the

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two men squatted on their rock again, like two watchdogs eyeing a bone, "each of them scared to leave, for fear the other will run off with it," as Marie-Anaïk put it.

"That has always been the trouble with this island," she went on. "Everybody hugging what he's got and trying to get the best of the next one. Scrounging and figuring and nosing around and then running off to the *mairie* or the customs office to tell on the neighbor. Take Amélie—she'd lay in her year's wine here and now if she got the chance, but she just couldn't bear to have anyone else get theirs in the same way."

"When I was a girl, there used to be regular fights over every stick of wood that came ashore. Wood was precious in those days; all we had to burn was gorse and ferns and seaweed or maybe cakes of dry cow-dung that we mixed with water, treading it with our feet, and plastered on the walls to dry. That made a slow, hot fire, but it was messy stuff to mix. You'd have laughed to have seen me then; I couldn't see a floating stick without going in after it. I'd wade in just like a spaniel." She laughed—a gay little tinkle like a girl's.

"Yes, that was how it was," she continued, "cutting seaweed on the rocks, lugging it up from the beach, stacking it to dry, and then spreading it on the fields. . . . Cutting gorse and brakes for the winter,

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and the women doing it all, with the help of the grandpas and the boys too young to be at sea. We don't have to work like that today. Life is easier. Maybe it has made us soft. People don't seem to have the taste for work they used to. Though sometimes I think the war was to blame: it started people thinking about themselves and striving to get all the enjoyment they can out of this world before they get bombed into the next. When I was a girl, we didn't count on wars."

The shadow that flitted across her face passed as swiftly as it came. Marie-Anaik is no storm-seeker. When storms come, she rides them out, and afterwards sets her barometer resolutely at "Fair." She pointed to the cask.

"I guess it was that thing that started me thinking about war. It's the first to come ashore in twenty years. Once in the last war, the U-boats got a ship out there off the Héaux Light. She was loaded with rum from America—little kegs, not big ones like this. They washed in by dozens, and the whole coast went crazy. You never saw such doings: people up to their waists in ice-cold water, fighting and yelling. At night, they built bonfires on the rocks to see the kegs when they came in, and sang and screeched like gulls. And drink! all day and all night—women and little children, drunk enough to founder. At last, we had to call in the soldiers to put things to rights."

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"Was Alain in it too?"

"That one,' God be praised, was with his regiment, or he'd have gone out of his head like the rest of them. Séverin, there, was home on leave at the time. His wife had to tie him up in the kitchen the night before his leave ran out, or he never would have got back to his ship.

"Yes," Marie-Anaik nodded, "those were crazy times. All the things the tide washed in—once the whole bridge of a ship, with all its instruments. Tins of coal oil and gasoline, pails of lard—it was good lard too, people said. And one day the whole beach was covered with crates of butter. Big yellow cakes that looked as fresh as the ones you buy on the market. But smell—you've smelled bilge, haven't you? Well, it was worse. The customs officer told us to bury the stuff; but some of the neighbors boiled it down, skimmed it and used it for cooking afterwards. I don't see how they stomached it. I couldn't, though we had little or no fat. I couldn't eat anything the sea brought in.

"You see," she went on, "convoys used to gather over there, at the mouth of the river. We'd see them start out in a long line, with the destroyers steaming up and down alongside like sheepdogs. Sometimes the U-boats would come right in and attack them. I saw one ship go down with my own eyes, out there just

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beyond the buoy. Auguste and I were digging potatoes in the field by the lighthouse. He called to me, ‘Maman, what’s the matter with that ship?’ We hadn’t heard a sound, but there she was, with her decks awash. There wasn’t a ripple or a breath of wind. She didn’t lift up or heel over, just settled down as if something was pulling her. All of a sudden, she wasn’t there. Auguste cried like a baby—he wasn’t much more than a baby then. I couldn’t cry—it was just as if something hit me here.” Marie-Anaik raised her hand to her breast. For a long moment she sat silent, frowning out at the sea. Then—

“It’s wicked!” she burst out. “All those beautiful ships! Not that I haven’t seen wrecks in my time. When I was a girl, scarcely a winter passed without some schooner getting into trouble on the rocks. But this just doesn’t make sense. Men destroying what they built with their own hands! They’re worse than the ocean. Build a ship and send her to the bottom. Raise up children and send them off to war. Every man and woman in the world knows it’s crazy, and yet we sit and let it happen.”

From the rocks below came sounds of strife. The little man with the gnome whiskers had got to his feet and was waving his arms. “I helped moor her, I’ve got my rights—” while Alain Lebras, his back to the bar-

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rel, boomed, "You'll take what I give you, Séverin Lancerf—"

"Look at them," Marie-Anaik said bitterly. "Two old . . . *fucuses* (she always drops into Breton when she wants an expletive) jawing over a wine barrel, when maybe the world is going to perdition! That's men for you—big and little, they're all alike. Never happy unless they're fighting over something. If women ran the world, there might be more talking—though I doubt it—but there would be less fighting. And talking never hurt anybody."

## 2. Death Watch

MÈRE, my old neighbor, was dead.

That afternoon I saw Amélie hurrying down the path, two long wax tapers protruding from beneath her cape. In her wake trotted a small boy carrying the "ornaments" from the church, two massive silver candlesticks and a crucifix. At milking-time, I found her in Marie-Anaik's garden, supervising Anne-Elise, who was clipping stalks of pink and white gillyflowers and sprays of lupin.

"No, no lilies, they're too heady," she was saying. "And put in plenty of laurel—it fills out the bouquets."

Amélie declined my offer of roses.

"It isn't for a young person," she said severely. "Besides, roses don't last at this season. It's an in-between season for flowers. In May, you have so much to choose from. Lilacs make a lovely decoration; for the Bochers' little Emmeline I put white ones around the bed and

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pinned rosebuds to the counterpane. I'm sorry you didn't see it—everyone said it was so pretty. For old people it doesn't matter so much. Two bouquets will do, Anne-Elise, one for the table and one to put on the floor between the candles. We'll have all her carnations for the funeral."

Mère's carnations—she had a whole bed of them, red and white in her little walled-in dooryard. Whenever I called, she never failed to offer me a generous cluster. "Though they're not the fancy kind summer people raise in their gardens. They're old-fashioned, like me." I often met her at the well, with rope and pail, dipping up water for her plants. "They're as thirsty as cows, but they do like sandy soil. I can't get them to grow anywhere else." She never would let me help her with her pail. "It's only a little pail," she would say, holding it out of reach, "and I'm an old woman who lives alone. I have to look after myself."

At eighty-nine, she did "look after herself," in her tiny thatched cottage down by the inlet, a widow for more than half a century and quite alone. There was only a nephew on the "continent," a mason in Le Mans whom she always spoke of with a touch of scornful pity—a renegade who lived inland, and "raised daughters." Mère's own men had always followed the sea.

Once a week, Mère walked to town for bread, a

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spare little figure in a filet cap, moving slowly over the path, but with each step as decided as Marie-Anaik's own. "I take my time, but I get there," she always said. Any of the neighbors would gladly have brought her the weekly loaf, but no, she would accept no favors. Besides, the trip to town was an event. She liked to see "movement." At sunset you invariably saw her, perched on a big stone at the end of her low wall, watching the fishing boats swing about Roc-ker-varech on their way home to the mainland. "It's been a good day for fishing," she would say. Or, "Not much in the nets today with that sou'wester a-blowing."

She did her own washing, too, though often the neighbor women contrived to help her, rubbing her linen with their own, on the pretext that there was only room for one at a time at the big stone slab beside the well. Marie-Anaik worried about the old woman's food and managed to slip her a little milk now and then, a bowl of rice pudding, or a plate of Sunday stew. Mère accepted attentions from Marie-Anaik, who was neighborly to everyone, so they could not be construed as "charity." But even Marie-Anaik always took care to bring her gifts to the cottage after dark.

I never learned her name. She was Mère to the whole community. A brave little figure, independent as any island woman and resistant as an old ship's timber,

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though she had “seen trouble enough in her day,” Marie-Anaik told me. And now Mère was dead.

On our island, we do not “sit up” with the dead. We “pay them a visit.” Bretons no longer feel the need to “*faire la veillée*” with the living—to gather about a neighbor’s hearth at night to talk over local happenings and listen to sailors’ yarns as they did in lonely days when news, like entertainment, was a home product. Nowadays they stay by their own fires at night and read the newspaper or listen to the radio. But they still visit the dead.

The *veillée* for the dead begins late in the evening. Towards ten o’clock, when the dishes are washed and the children in bed, the women slip on a fresh apron and take down the black bonnet from its hook—the everyday bonnet, not the best one, reserved for Sundays, fêtes and funerals. The men indulge in a hasty wash and brush-up and the families start out in twos and threes, their lanterns moving through the dark like running lights of ships.

The wind had risen when Marie-Anaik called for me, wrapped in her black shawl, a storm-lantern swinging from her arm. It was black night outside with not a star showing: only the beam from the lighthouse flitted across the garden in ghostly flashes with blackness tripping at its heels.

“It makes the night darker, the way a lantern does,”

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Marie-Anaik said. She would never carry a lantern were it not for the *sourds*—those shiny orange-and-black salamanders that crawl out from their holes at night and lie like slugs upon the path. Marie-Anaik has a horror of *sourds*. She knows they are harmless things, but they belong to the night. Her feeling about the night is primitive. It takes something really important—a sick neighbor or a calving cow—to lure her out of doors after nightfall. Marie-Anaik is no coward, but such things lie deeper than reason. Not for the world would she go wandering alone over the moor in the darkness.

The wind lay in wait for us at the gate, where a sudden puff whipped out the lantern. Marie-Anaik set it down with a testy “*tant pis*” and tucked her arm through mine. Linked together, we stumbled ahead over the stony path, battling with gusts so damp they almost had body. It was as if light had never been, and only the wind were alive. As we groped our way through the blackness, I understood what had peopled the coast with legends—with *korriganes* and *lutins* and drowned men who come up from the sea and walk over the moor on moonless nights.

“Marie-Anaik, do you believe the drowned come back?”

She clutched my arm.

“Don’t talk about such things!” As she spoke, a

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light shone out ahead, a yellow beam so reassuring that her grip on my arm relaxed. Her voice spoke close to my ear.

"You remember how it was with Mère and her boy?"

She had told me the story before, but this time it came like an answer to my question.

"Fifty years ago it was, when Mère had just lost her man and Jean, her boy, was with the Fleet. She woke out of her sleep one night and there was Jean by the chimney and a candle burning on the table.

"Oh, it's you, my son. What are you doing there?"

"Making a fire, Maman. I'm cold."

"Shan't I get up and make it for you?"

"No, Maman, I can still light a fire."

"There's coffee in the pot, my son. Drink it all, that will warm you."

"And then," Marie-Anaik whispered huskily, "the light went out and there was no one there! Mère thought she must have dreamed it all. But Jean died that night, off Dakar, drowned in the harbor on his way to the ship. The news came weeks afterward."

"Do *you* think it was a dream?"

Marie-Anaik hugged my arm.

"Who knows? There are so many such stories. Mère herself knew any number. Poor Mère—she lost her man and her boy, both at sea. And two grandsons

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who went down with the *Bouvet* in the last war. Have you noticed how such things run in families? Almost as if *le Bon Dieu* had a grudge."

The light we had seen streamed through the open door of Mère's cottage. A group of men stood talking in the garden, but as yet, no one had entered the house. The room was as I had always seen it, neat and bare as a ship's cabin—the tall cupboards facing the door, the dresser with its plate-rack and tiny Virgin, the clock in the corner. Only the table had been taken out and the benches moved against the wall. And the chimney was fireless.

Mère lay on her bed, in her filet cap, hands folded on her breast, a rosary wound about her fingers. Its beads shone like tiny coals on the white sheet. The flame of the tapers swayed and streamed in the draft from the door, the only movement in the room. We were not the first to come. Death had slipped in there before us—the first Visitor.

Little by little, the benches filled. The neighbors entered, paused a moment by the bed, then the men returned to the garden and the women took their seats by the wall. Amélie flitted in and out, exchanging whispers with the newcomers, straightening a taper, crumpling a fallen flower petal. This was Amélie's domain. She presided over it like a hostess.

There was nothing constrained or grim in the still-

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ness of the cottage. Death comes so easily to the old—merely a closing of the eyes. Mère had no family to mourn her. But that was not all. The island accepts death simply. It belongs to the cycle of things, like winter or birth. Illness that ends in death is a normal accident, even when it happens to the young. Only sudden death is tragic—when the sea takes the young and strong-bodied. “It’s against nature,” Marie-Anaik says. In all my years of the island I had known of only one such tragedy, when a fishing boat with three neighbor boys foundered in a January squall off the north coast. Only a hundred yards from land—even a mediocre swimmer could have reached the shore. But few island men can swim. “Swimming prolongs dying,” Bretons say. That day, there was mourning on the whole island, as if death had struck at every cottage.

It came to me suddenly that in fourteen years I had never before paid the last “visit” to a woman. Men had died, but only men. Of the women on the bench beside me, five were widows. “The men go the way of drink, and the women live on forever,” Marie-Anaik always said. In our sailor community, that seemed to be the rule. In twenty-five years at sea, a man learns to drink for distraction. “What else is there to do, in those foreign ports, so far away from home?” When he returns, still young (forty-five to fifty), with a comfortable pension and little to keep him busy, he goes

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on drinking, as an escape from boredom. And within one year, or five, or ten, depending on his resistance and vitality, he does escape, once and for all, and the island counts another widow.

Sixteen women that night in Mère's little cottage, three men in the garden. That is the usual proportion. The older men are dead, and the young ones at sea.

The first visitors to come were older women, Pauline Legall among the last. She came in at a gust, as if the wind had blown her, clutching her shawl about her shoulders, her hair in untidy strings under the drooping frills of her bonnet. "Rigged as though she'd ridden out a gale, *la pauvre*," the lighthouse keeper's wife whispered. "Poor" Pauline was in reality one of the richest widows in our neighborhood. But she had "no character," people said. She had shown that years ago when she married her late husband. Who but a spineless woman would have put up with Jean Le Bihan for twenty years and have mourned him afterwards as if she had lost a saint? But Pauline Legall had always been "soft"—a polite way of saying she was a little daft.

Close at her heels trotted a shaggy dog. It was like Pauline Legall to bring her dog. Amélie shooed it out with a scandalized flutter of her apron. The dog was another example of Pauline's "daftness." Rumor said she treated it like a human: set a plate for it at table,

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and even—though this might be sheer slander—called the dog “Jean,” when she was alone with it. “Enough to make your flesh creep,” Amélie had once declared, though she said the dog’s behavior did show points in common with that of the late Le Bihan, “running off for days at a time with all the bitches on the island. Pauline can’t even keep a dog at home!”

She neared the bed with little sidewise steps as if something pushed her against her will, and all at once broke into convulsive sobbing. It sounded strangely out of place; the women eyed her with shocked impatience. Amélie darted forward and slipped an arm about the widow’s waist, but she broke away. Pressing her knuckles to her mouth, she fled from the room.

“She ought not to come, but you can’t keep her away,” Anna Goaster, the lighthouse keeper’s wife, whispered. “With all this war talk she’s dafter than ever.”

“It ought not to make much difference to her. She’s got no one to lose.”

That came from Marie-Anaik’s daughter, Anne-Elise, a petulant slip of a girl, with little promise of her mother’s comeliness in her sharp features. (“My ‘war-child,’ ” Marie-Anaik called her. “She didn’t get enough to eat when I was carrying her, and I never have been able to fill her since.”)

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Until then, no one had mentioned war. Perhaps the night was to blame, and the visit to the dead.

"Night belongs to the dead" . . . Where had I heard that said? On another island, in a palm-leaf hut. The speaker was Teura the Deacon, a Seventh Day Adventist in a white man's shirt, but he wore a scarlet pareo on his heathen legs. He had just told me, sinking his voice to a whisper, that the old gods were not dead. They had only gone into hiding and lurked underground and in the mountain, while awaiting their hour. At nightfall they came creeping from their holes, with the *tu-pa-pa-u*, the restless dead. "It is not good to walk at night under the palms; night belongs to the dead." Marie-Anaik herself might have echoed Teura's words.

For an hour, the night had gripped us. Then, abruptly, a phrase sufficed to sweep us into the present among things we had forgotten. For the first time, the silence weighed. Anna Goaster broke it, clearing her throat with a self-conscious cough.

"I turned my hay for the third time today," she said, raising her voice in a tone of conversation.

"Probably you'll be turning it again," someone commented. "We're going to have rain before morning."

Then the uncomfortable silence fell again. A woman by the door remarked hastily she had been at her hay for the past three weeks, raking and spreading. Before

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she could get it on the stack, it always rained. "It's black as seaweed now. When it dries, it will all go to dust."

Amélie, who had been listening at the door, could not resist predicting that everybody's hay was sure to rot. "Nothing good can happen this year. There hasn't been so wet a summer since 1914."

"Fourteen was a dry year," Marie-Anaik corrected. "It was in fourteen that the whole east shore burned over."

"Yes, and a dreadful thing it was, that fire," Amélie agreed, not a whit discountenanced. "I remember telling Anna Goaster's man then, that it pointed to something. When I saw the red fire-flag on the Semaphore, I said—"

"You'll be seeing other flags up there before long," Marie-Anaik's daughter put in sharply. That reference to mobilization flags on the signal-staff provoked a stir along the benches. A breeze of whispers shook the black bonnets. "Will it come to that?" "It can't be possible!" "My man says he thinks—" Amélie hissed a warning "S-sh!" from the doorway and Marie-Anaik said firmly, pulling her shawl taut around her shoulders,

"Well, I shan't believe it, not until I see the flags."

After that, conversation dropped. Little Annie Prigent looked appealingly to the bed, as if to ask for

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Mère's opinion. But the calm old face beneath the streaming tapers was beyond all knowledge of war.

"I lost a calf in that fire," a woman at the end of my bench said plaintively. "And my man burned his arms so bad, Amélie had to come every day for weeks to bandage them."

Her remark fell unnoticed like a leaf on a grass plot. Not a blade stirred. But Amélie, who had stepped into the garden, reappeared at the mention of her name. She had the breathless look she always wore when she had something to impart. I judged it must be catastrophic, though from Amélie's expression you never knew whether she brought news of a great or only a minor tragedy. She stooped to Marie-Anaik's ear, bending stiffly from the hips.

"Séverin's big ewe is dead."

Behind her, Séverin's gnome-like whiskers came into view around the door-jamb. He advanced clumsily, on tiptoe, eager to repeat his story and started in before Amélie could forestall him.

"I roped her feet and got her on the ground to shear her. Maybe I let her down too hard. I started in with the shears and Alain Lebras came by and said, 'That's a mighty quiet sheep you've got there.' And quiet she was, dead she was, and I hadn't noticed."

That *was* a loss. Every woman on the benches calculated: meat, so much; wool, so much; lambs—

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"She gave you two lambs this spring, didn't she?" Marie-Anaik inquired.

"Three, and all three big enough now for the butcher." Séverin rubbed his bald crown, white as a skull-cap above his sunburnt cheeks, with a single lock of hair sprawling across it like a limp comma.

"She was a fine fat sheep, and now I'll have to plant her," he said ruefully. Here Amélie found her chance to slip in a word.

"That's how it is with all of us, sooner or later, sheep and men alike," she reminded us, with a mournful nod towards the bed behind the tapers. Then, after a decent interval, "It's just a few minutes to midnight. You'll find coffee next door at Alice Bozec's."

Coffee at midnight concludes the "visit" to the dead. It is served with generous slabs of bread and butter, and for those who may be thirsty, cider and wine. When the meal is over, the "guests" file back to the room where the silver crucifix glitters in the long flames of the tapers. They stand for a moment by the bed, cross themselves with a vague gesture like a farewell, and tiptoe out again, leaving the sleeping host or hostess to the watchers who remain throughout the night.

That night, there were three of us left in Mère's tiny cottage, Marie-Anaik, Séverin and myself. Amélie replaced the burnt tapers with fresh ones, carried the

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flowers into the garden and after a last look around the room, took herself off with an apologetic "I have to get *some* sleep, I'm worn out." She did not look it, but we took her at her word. Before leaving, she gave her orders: "You, Marie-Anaik, are to stay until sunrise, and you, Madame, can go when she does. It's good of you to keep her company. Séverin, here, will wait until the carpenter brings the coffin. It ought to be done by nine o'clock tomorrow; he promised to work on it all night. I'll be back myself by then." Her black skirts flitted for the last time through the doorway, and we heard her light step patter down the path.

"She's a useful woman, *quand même*," Séverin remarked, with a yawn. He dragged two armchairs from their corners for Marie-Anaik and me, "in case you want to drop off now and then," and settled himself on a straw-bottomed stool, his feet hooked about the legs. No, he didn't need a chair-back, he would not be sleepy. "You see, I'm used to standing watch."

A hush settled on the room. For the first time, I heard the clock, and like an echo to its solemn tick, the faint tock-tock of raindrops in the garden. I said we were three in the cottage—now with the silence, I realized that we were four, three living and one dead. Yet between us I was conscious of no barrier, only sleep. As if a current ran through us to her without a break. I recalled what Chinese friends had said of death.

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"Death is an incident, a milestone on the route, a fulfillment, not an end. Death is part of Life." Was not that the philosophy of my island neighbors? In cities, we treat death as an intruder. This was better. This was as it should be.

Marie-Anaik sat erect in her armchair, her hands resting lightly on the arms. That is the way she always sits. (Her notion of comfort is at least three centuries behind mine.) She objects to modern chairs that "throw you out of balance." She prefers a hard-seated, straight-backed Louis XIII chair—like the one she sat in now—built for people like herself who "don't need to stretch out to rest themselves."

I looked from Marie-Anaik to Mère. How alike they were—the same full forehead, the same neatly cut, spare features. Only Mère's wrinkles had cut deeper. At the age of Mère, or even of Marie-Anaik, city women are like crumpled silk. They lack the fullness, the solid something of these island faces, in which bone and flesh seem welded together. Even death cannot change them.

Twisting around on his stool, Séverin rested his bearded chin on his knuckles and surveyed me with round unwinking eyes.

"They say you've sailed on foreign seas, Madame."

"And you?"

"Oh, with me it's natural. I ought to know most of

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them. You see—" modestly—"it was my job for forty years."

That was the beginning. To the ticking of the clock and the hissing of rain on the heather, while Marie-Anaik dozed bolt upright in the walnut chair and the tapers shortened in their sockets, Séverin and I kept the *veillée*. No doubt the old room had heard such stories many times. Mère, too, must have known the names of Séverin's ships: the *Etoile de Russie*, the *Orient*, the great five-masted *France* that went aground on the Barrier Reef "with sharks jumping around us like herring when she broke up; and only a cup of water apiece for twelve days running until they took us off." And the *Asia* that lay on her side for two whole weeks off the Irish coast (was it the *Asia* that supplied the theme for Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcissus*?) while her crew "grubbed in the sand-ballast like ground-hogs" in their effort to right her. "Right her we did, but nobody's hands had a shred of skin left on them afterwards, not even the Captain's." Cyclones off the Fiji islands where storms are born; gales in the Bight where the swell comes "straight off the Pole and piles up seas big enough to break any ship's back," where the icy canvas is "stiff as a rock and as heavy" and "there's as much water aloft as there is in the sea."

While Séverin talked on, I almost fancied Mère was listening. And yet she must have known his tales by

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heart. Perhaps that was why they interested her no longer and so, like Marie-Anaik, she had dozed off, indifferent, at this her last *veillée*.

"Nineteen times around the Horn and so many times around the Cape that I've lost count. But I'd have kept on, right up to now, if the World War hadn't been the death of sail."

Marie-Anaik stirred in her chair and drew a long sighing breath.

"You're talking about the war again?" she said wearily. "I don't see how I ever could live through another war."

### 3. North and South

ALAIN LEBRAS had been away all day hauling potatoes to the pier for a farmer at the southern end of the island. As few farmers own horses (there are only six or seven on the entire island) Alain's black Bijou is constantly in demand.

"As if I didn't have enough to do with my own potatoes," Alain grumbles. But the pay is tempting—thirty to sixty francs a day, depending on the nature of the load, and though Alain may grumble, he rarely says no when sent for.

But this time, something had definitely gone wrong. I had scarcely entered the court when I heard his voice, pitched in a key that always denoted anger. In ordinary conversation, Alain spoke in a rumble bass that often swelled to a shout even under normal circumstances, since a certain amount of blustering and bellowing sits well on a man who has spent twenty-three years at sea, only two years short of earning his pension. But when

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his voice climbed the scale . . . I found him in the kitchen, slapping gobs of butter on a chunk of bread, with a pitcher of cider at his elbow.

"Locked herself up in the house, she did—and not a drop or a bite she gave us, morning or evening. And for lunch, pig-food she gave us—and cider from the well! She can drown in her well before I go back there!"

Marie-Anaik nodded across the fat-bellied churn.

"It's not as if she didn't know better—"

"Know better—and she born here and her mother before her! A woman who can't keep her own man at home, nor get one that's decent to work for her."

Marie-Anaik's eyes crinkled.

"You're not so decent yourself?" she asked.

Alain grunted.

"I'm an old fool—but once is the last time." He washed down the bread with two full glasses of cider.

"And yet she's no worse than the others," he said, while his voice dropped back to its normal key. "They're all alike in the South."

The "South" means the southern half of the island, only three miles away, beyond a narrow stone causeway that the sea laps on both sides at high tide. Tradition says Vauban built the causeway (Bretons like to give him the credit for any construction that looks big and lasting), though there is nothing in that humble strip

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of road to suggest the skill of the great engineer. Any island mason might have built it. The *pont Vauban* joins what was originally two distinct islands. That may explain to some extent the enmity between North and South. It goes back as far as anyone can remember and accounted for a good many broken heads in the old days. Today it lives on in occasional schoolboy battles and in the deep-rooted conviction that the people at the opposite end of the island are "different." We of the North claim that Southerners are stingy with their cider—the worst thing you can say of any man in a region where cider flows even more plentifully than water. To the South, the Northerners are "savages"—an opinion that probably dates from the time when fishermen and deep-sea sailors eked out a meager living and ours was the poorest district of the island.

"We of the North have always been sailors," Alain Lebras states with pride. "We" were fighters, too, throughout the years when England was the hereditary enemy and the north shore bore the brunt of raids from across the Channel. Even the northern women have their fighting legend. Marie-Anaik enjoys telling that story—how one summer day when the men were all at sea, an English raider bore in from the horizon like a great white hawk. The women climbed to the little fort where the Semaphore now stands,

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primed the one bronze cannon and when all was ready, paraded the ramparts, with their churns on their heads and the dashers held martially over their shoulders. So that the raider veered and brought about, and once more skimmed off over the horizon. The English had taken the marching figures for a regiment of grenadiers!

Knowing the women of the North, I firmly believe that story. I can easily picture them taking over the fort, Marie-Anaik in the lead.

So, beginning with the old days, timid folk—farmers and merchants, “people with something to save,” as Marie-Anaik puts it—sought refuge in the South, the point nearest the mainland, where escape was easy. There they remain today, though danger no longer threatens from the sea, “hugging their strong-boxes and grudging even a glass of cider to a thirsty man on a hot June day,” according to Alain.

So with the years, to the scorn of the mariner for people who live on land, was added another motive for dislike—the resentment of the poor man towards his wealthier neighbor. To Alain, all the people at the southern end of the island are “rich.” “The fat money bags of the South,” he used to call them, and sometimes “the fat bourgeois.” A bourgeois, Alain says, is a man “who has time to sit down, morning and afternoon, if he wants to,” and so much money in his

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pockets that every year his francs "hatch out little ones," like a hen with chickens. Money in such quantities can never come from work alone. All his life—"sixty-one years, Madame, on St. Michel's day"—Alain has worked like three men (that is strictly true) and he knows what it has brought him.

As an illustration of what he means, he always points to Louis Le Greguer, who owns the fleet of launches that run back and forth between the island and the mainland. Every stick of wood, every lump of coal; lime, cement, sand and cider-apples; all the sugar and coffee and drygoods the shops sell in the village; all that the island produces and all that comes to the island must pass through his hands. He takes toll on every pound of it, though "he never dug a potato or drove a nail in his life." The potato crop is the sorest point. "When potatoes sell for forty-five francs the sack on the mainland, he gives you thirty. And if you don't own a horse, you must pay Le Greguer for hauling your potatoes to the port!"

"Why don't you club together and buy a launch of your own? Why don't you form a co-operative of potato-growers and sell your crops on the market?" I asked him once.

Alain said doubtfully it might be a good idea. He had heard talk of co-operatives, though from what people said, they did not always work.

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"We would need a smart man to run it, someone as smart as Le Greguer. Maybe if I was younger—"

"You, run a co-operative?" Marie-Anaik caught him up with a scornful laugh. "You can't sell a cow or a potato without starting a war! You'd spend all your time quarreling with the neighbors and in a month there'd be a revolution."

Alain overlooked the interruption.

"—And a man like that would have to have instruction," he went on, still pursuing his idea. "I never had time for school when I was a boy. Many's the time it has stood in my way. In the last war, I'd have been a corporal but for that. 'We'll pay you like a corporal, for you deserve it, but I can't give you the stripes,' the Colonel said. 'A corporal has to be an educated man.' "

Alain at sixty-one cannot read a line of print and signs his name with a cross.

Today he no longer speaks of the rich men of the island as "fat money bags" or even "bourgeois." He has a new name for them—they are "Gangulars." That came about after the Cagoule plots caused such a scandal in 1937 and were hushed up so unaccountably afterwards, even though (or perhaps because) it was disclosed that many prominent citizens had received funds and munitions from "a foreign power." The measures taken to suppress the movement had satis-

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fied no one, except perhaps the men implicated. The disbanded Croix de Feu took shape again under a new name, and while a number of presumed plotters had been arrested, these were manifestly little fellows. The main Cagoulards were still supposed to be at large.

Alain Lebras felt sure we had "a nest of them" right on the island. In the South, of course. Though unable to read the papers, he had followed the affair with passion. Indeed, few people talked of anything else at the time. Directly or indirectly, the plots were aimed at the Popular Front government; there, nearly everyone was agreed. People spoke of the movement as a Fascist *putsch*, nipped opportunely in the bud. But had it been effectively nipped? Alain said no. As proof, was not the South full of "Gangulars"? Thanks to the affair, he now had a new reason for distrusting Southerners: they were traitors, paid agents of Hitler. But even with his distrust of people of the South, Alain found it hard to believe any island man would sink so low. There remained the "Parisians."

Anyone not born on the island was by definition a "Parisian," irrespective of what part of France or of the world in general he came from. Some became islanders by adoption, but by far the greater number belonged to the summer colony. Before the last war, summer visitors were a rarity. Most of those who came were painters in search of a quiet spot on the coast that

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was both picturesque and cheap. They brought no money to the island. The flood of tourists arrived with after-war prosperity; when automobiles were no longer curiosities on Brittany roads, and enterprising Le Greguer introduced launches as a substitute for sail-boats on the Narrows.

The average islander relied on the "Parisians" for a part of his yearly income in much the same way that he counted on the potato crop. His part in the summer game went all the way from selling vegetables from his garden to moving his family into a shed or a stable for the months of July and August, while he let his house.

Few picnickers pushed their exploring to our end of the island. ("What's there to see here anyhow? Nothing but rocks," Alain said.) A few neighbors rented their houses for the season—Amélie among them—though rumor said she did it less for the money she received than the chance to pry into the doings of a family that couldn't get away from her! Our "Parisians" belonged to the permanent variety—people who owned houses and came to the island regularly every summer.

M. le Colonel, who spent his summers in an ivy-covered house on the south slope of the Semaphore hill, was an older resident than I. The trees he planted had had time to grow into a grove—the only trees on

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the north shore. His house was the show place of our district until a Lyons silk-manufacturer bought the point across the inlet and put up a “residence” (in pseudo-Brittany style, with a massive cement roof built to simulate thatch, resting on fat stone pillars) with boat-houses down on the shore and guest-houses standing among baby pines in the newly landscaped garden.

Neither the Colonel’s house nor the silk man’s could be seen from our “village.” The hill of the Semaphore hid them both. The only “summer” house in our immediate neighborhood (aside from a new house, never yet lived in, that comes into the story later) belonged to a Paris journalist, and it was a modest granite cottage of the same age and style as *Cœur à l’Ancre*. He had purchased it ten years before and began remodeling the interior; but the work was never completed and the house stayed empty. Now and then, when the owner came to the island for a week-end, we would see him, a heavy man in a worn serge suit, seated on a rock among the weeds of what might have been a garden.

He had the look of a man who contemplates a broken dream, or one he is powerless to realize. His name was well known in Paris journalism—as editor of one of the small journals of opinion, much esteemed by professional men and statesmen, but with a narrow

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circle of readers. "One of the few honest sheets in Paris," some people called it. Was it not proof enough, that the editor was no richer?

Even Alain Lebras hesitated to call the journalist a "Gangular." But when it came to the Lyons factory-owner, he had no doubts whatsoever. "*En voilà un, pour sûr*"—a man who buys a whole point and shuts it off with a wall!" That wall almost caused a revolution in the district when the owner built it. Not that there was anything reprehensible in walls; every garden on the island is walled in, and many of the fields as well. Fruit trees need walls to lean on, and growing things require shelter from the wind. The low walls around the fields have no real use—the crews of Newfoundland fishing schooners built them years ago; the men had to be kept busy during the winter months. Every such wall has gate posts, but not one of them ever boasted a gate. People could come and go as they pleased. But the silk-man's wall was high, and the gate higher yet. No garden lay behind it, no fruit trees, only lawn. He meant it to shut people out—to keep them from taking the shortest path to the beach, so that they had to go out of their way along the bay and over the rocks to reach their boats. He even put up signs, "Private property," an unheard-of thing. Fence in land and lock it up, for no other reason than because it was his! Désir, the old caretaker, said the manufac-

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turer had planned to run the wall down to the water's edge. Of course that was out of the question, since the beach belonged to the state. But he would have done it, if he could. He said so himself. He would have kept the fishers from their own beach! Oh, he was a "Gangular" all right—and probably one of Hitler's men. Was he not against the people, and were not the people, France?

As for the Colonel—Alice Bozec's Etienne had mended that gentleman's radio set during his last leave and had seen with his own eyes a photograph on the Colonel's desk. It was the portrait of another Colonel, Colonel de la Rocque, once leader of the Croix de Feu and now head of the Parti Socialiste Français. That could mean only one thing. As Etienne Bozec said at the time, when you found a photograph of Colonel de la Rocque on the wall, there was generally one of Hitler or the Duce behind the door. On Etienne's own ship, the flagship of the Fleet, the portraits of all three used to hang in the officers' mess—that is to say, they hung there until the men sent a delegation to the Admiral, who made the officers take them down. Though maybe the Admiral would not have acted so promptly if someone had not written the story to the papers and some deputy or other raised a rumpus about it at the Chambre. There were lots of things that never got into the papers, Etienne said. According to him, all

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the officers of the Navy were enemies of the Republic. They wanted a king or a Führer, so they could "keep the people down." Etienne advised Alain and the others to keep an eye on the Colonel.

Yet it seemed almost too bad, Alain said, to list the Colonel as a Cagoulard. A friendly little man, not above saying "good morning" when he met a neighbor in the lane, though stiff in conversation. Perhaps he owed that to his military training. The real Cagoulard in that household was "Madame la Colonelle." She talked to people (when she condescended to speak to them) as if she were "heads taller than anyone." (This is Alain again.) She had no need of a fence or a dog to keep the neighbors from passing through *her* garden. No one enjoyed working for her either. She always found the bills too high and the hours too short. And she kept pestering people with questions about why they didn't go to mass. She was a very pious woman.

My own feeling about Madame la Colonelle coincided with Alain's, though she never asked me why I did not go to mass, and when she spoke to me it was not as if she were "heads taller" than I—at most, only an inch or so. I never had any distinct feeling about her at all until one day in the summer of 1938 when I crossed with her on the launch from the mainland, and she undertook me on the subject of Spanish refugees, those "frightful people" who were swarming into

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France, loaded with loot, "to start a revolution" and murder the clergy. When I asked her whether she thought we had a right to shut out people who were fleeing for their lives, Madame la Colonelle eyed me with stony suspicion.

"They *deserve* to be shot—all those Reds," she said acidly. "But perhaps you approve this government of ours, sending this vermin all the Army's Red Cross supplies and all the blankets. So that if a war comes, there won't be anything left for our own poor soldiers!" Then the refrain: "Poor France, always so hospitable, so imposed on, overrun with Jews and Germans and Italians *et que sais-je?* And now these Spaniards . . ." She predicted life would soon be unsafe for all of us. The "*œuvre*" she belonged to had been quietly procuring civilian clothes for French nuns, in case—"Nurses' uniforms, with long blue capes, quite decent and appropriate." Very useful, too, in the country. She wore one herself. If I should like a cape, she would be delighted to procure one for me, very cheap. A terrible woman.

Another time, I heard her holding forth at the village inn, on the subject of the two weeks' vacation with pay for workers of all categories, which the Blum government had succeeded in putting through, along with the forty-hour week. Madame la Colonelle disapproved of both measures. They encouraged laziness, she main-

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tained. "You can't get anyone to work any more. What will the country come to? And all this city riffraff, spoiling our beaches and corrupting the peasants with their godless doctrines!" The innkeeper's wife assured her that so far as she was concerned no such people would ever come to *her* place. She had boosted the price of the meals she served another ten francs. That would keep them out. As I listened I could not help recalling the first vacation trains I had seen leaving the Gare Montparnasse—racks piled with fishing rods, lunch baskets and shrimp nets—rolling out to the sound of singing. One man in particular whom I saw on the platform, a child on his shoulder, a bulgy bag in one hand and a toy pail with patty-pans and shovel in the other, so jubilant he could not help confiding to the world at large: "We're off to the sea-shore, like the bourgeois. The first vacation I ever had!"

Alain Lebras said he thought the Colonel's lady might be right, however, about the forty-hour week. Forty hours seemed to him pretty easy going for an able-bodied man. Of course, not every man could work as he did, but even so—No doubt city living made folks lazy, buying food at the store and riding around in buses and trams—though no one could deny city men were smart. One of Pauline Legall's vacationers had fixed the widow's pump. "Took it apart and greased it, and when he found the frost had split one

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of the parts, he went off to the blacksmith's and made another. He spent a whole afternoon on the job, but he wouldn't let the widow pay him for it. He said he wasn't here to work."

As for "corrupting the peasants," that made Marie-Anaik laugh. "She takes us for savages still. You might have told her my Yves, just turned seventeen, has been twice to Japan. That's farther than the Colonel ever traveled. 'Corrupt us'—she'd find 'godless doctrines' enough right here on this island, if she went looking for them."

"The Colonel's lady is a 'white,'" Alain threw in. Marie-Anaik nodded.

"When I was a girl we used to call them that. All for the curés and the king, though we've been a republic for I don't know how many years. I suppose it was pleasanter for them in the old days—aristocrats on top and the poor folk working to keep them comfortable. That's why they'd like to go back. . . . But we won't go back. I'd shoulder a gun myself if I thought there was any risk of it!" Marie-Anaik's eyes snapped, and she spoke the word "aristocrat" like a daughter of the sans-culottes, as she undoubtedly was.

Alain murmured something about "taking a pitchfork to the 'Gangulars.'"

At that, Marie-Anaik had to laugh again.

"You would do better with a fork than with a gun,

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that's sure. Well, God be praised, it hasn't come to that. But you can tell Madame la Colonelle for me that all the 'godless doctrines' in the world won't keep me from going to mass if I want to. But when I go, it won't be because the Colonel's lady tells me to!"

Marie-Anaik, like most of the neighbors—with the exception of Amélie—took her religion easily. That is to say, she had her children baptized and had them learn their catechism as a matter of course. Baptism, first communion, like marriages and funerals, belonged to the social pattern, like the yearly *pardon*, or the custom of paying rents and debts on St. Michel's day. It would be "queer" to give them up; besides, some of the sacraments, like first communion, had practical advantages. To omit it might stand in the way of a lad's employment, or hinder his advancement. Most employers were "whites." But as for going to church—"That is my own business," Marie-Anaik said. "Maybe Amélie is better for going and maybe I'm worse for staying away. My father—and he was a good man if ever there was one—always used to tell us, 'Believe in the *Bon Dieu* but stay away from the curés!' That's the way it has always looked to me. I don't need a curé to tell me when I've done wrong."

"The curés are with the 'Gangulars,'" Alain Lebras put in.

"That's a curious thing, isn't it? The *Bon Dieu*

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came to this world for all of us—He was just a poor man, like ‘that one.’ But His church is rich, and rich folks side together wherever you find them, don’t you think? Maybe I’m wrong, but that’s the way it looks to me.”

Talk such as this used to disturb me at first. I had difficulty in reconciling it with the classic picture of Brittany: Brittany and its church towers and shrines, its *pardons* and processions; “pious” Brittany. The churches and the old shrines still stood, crowds thronged to the yearly *pardons*, every parish set up altars for the *Fête Dieu* and processions wound through the flower-strewn streets. But underneath, the talk went on, like an echo of what I had heard so often in Paris. Had anti-clericalism—that red rag of French politics since the days of the Separation—undermined the stronghold of the faith?

Madame la Colonelle and her friends held the republic responsible. The republic and the “godless nation,” they said, went hand in hand. Marxism had corrupted the cities; now it was spreading to the country, thanks to the Popular Front. What could you expect, with a socialist cabinet in Paris, and the Premier a Jew!

Yet among my neighbors I found little evidence of out-and-out materialism. “God, if not the church,” seemed to be their motto. They still adjusted their lives

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to its pattern, but underneath lay the feeling that the church was somehow no longer theirs, that it had gone over to the enemy.

"God is with the people," Marie-Anaik maintained. In fourteen years that word "people" had taken on new meaning. I doubt if many of my neighbors on the island realized what factors lay behind that change. But when they said "people," it was like an echo of the past. The "people" against the "aristocrats." Who were the "aristocrats" in 1939?

No one needed any vacationists from the city to furnish the answer. For six years, France had been the battleground for warring political and social creeds. Depression and unemployment had fostered them; the establishment of the Popular Front government had done little more than stiffen the backs of the opponents, galvanize their hostility and stir them to action. Two hostile camps, each flying its flag above the tricolor: the hammer and sickle on one; and on the other, the bundle of lictor's rods and the hooked cross. But the tricolor, too, flew with them. The battle was for France. Who would "dictate" France's future?

What took place in the cities found its inevitable repercussion in the country. Where city folk said "proletariat" and "capitalist," on the island men spoke of "people" and "whites." After the discovery of the munition plots, the "whites" became Cagoulards. As

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the months went on, the breach between hostile groups widened constantly; feeling grew more intense and talk more bitter. And over it all, black and threatening since 1938, hung the shadow of international war.

No doubt our island reflected trends of thought in France more faithfully than did certain inland districts of Brittany. Though remote from any great center, it had contact with the cities through the tourists, and with the world in general through its men, who sailed the seven seas and returned from time to time with news of what they had heard and seen. The radio and the press contributed less than one might have expected to forming opinion. My neighbors were far more inclined to believe what a native islander reported than anything printed by an unknown editor or spoken by an equally unknown voice through the microphone.

There was no organized party or group activity of any sort on the island. Nowhere in France, I suppose, was that outstanding French trait—individualism—more strikingly in evidence. Small property holdings (on the island an acre was an “estate”), small incomes, few really poor and even fewer well-to-do (except for the “Parisians”) may have accounted for it. That—and the independent spirit that comes from a long and solitary struggle with the soil or with the sea. I always thought of the islanders as isolated cells, and

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yet each cell had its "color." By colors, they fell automatically into groups.

The "whites" formed a minority: all anti-republicans, advocates of a strong hand in government as opposed to "weak-kneed democracy," and strong supporters of the church. These were the Parisians and the local well-to-do. One might have thought the question of income determined their attitude, but among them one had to include persons like Amélie who possessed no income worth mentioning but to whom anything Monsieur le Colonel or Monsieur le Curé said was right as gospel.

The rest of the islanders were "people," according to Alain Lebras, but I could discover a distinction even here. There were those who said "people" with a revolutionary accent, and claimed the Popular Front government had not gone far enough in realizing its program; and there were those who left off the accent and preferred Daladier to Blum. Sailors still in active service belonged to both categories; with a few outstanding exceptions, those of the merchant fleet favored the first, and those of the Navy, the second. That was chiefly a matter of pensions, Etienne Bozec said. Navy pensions were higher than those of the merchant fleet. "It makes the men satisfied with their lot. They have their future assured and they're scared of a change." Etienne took a gloomy view of the Navy. "When the

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officers aren't out-and-out monarchists, they're for de la Rocque and the Fascists. And the men are more interested in the money they're going to get some day than they are in France and the republic. What's going to happen to France?"

Many people pondered that question during the years from 1936 to 1939. While Etienne took the Navy as typical of France at the time, it seemed to me that the island gave a completer picture. It was France in miniature.

One June evening, shortly after the Captain left for Marseilles, I received a visit from the Paris journalist. I had heard he was on the island—Marie-Anaik's daughter had met him in the village the day before—but his call came as a surprise. In ten years, our acquaintance had never progressed beyond a "*Bonjour, Monsieur,*" "*Bonjour, Madame,*" or an occasional halt for conversation, generally about the weather, when our paths crossed on the moor. Perhaps he knew I subscribed to his paper. There were not many of us on the island.

This time, however, there was no discussion of the weather. The editor lowered his bulky frame into an armchair, patted the dog who was sniffing at his trouser legs, then opened up abruptly.

"I want to ask you a question, not as a neighbor, but as a Frenchman and a republican. What do you

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know about Monsieur D——?” (He named the Lyons manufacturer.)

“Little or nothing,” I replied, “beyond the fact that he seems very unpopular with my neighbors. I have never met him.” The journalist looked disappointed.

“You can’t tell me anything about his habits, or the people he receives?”

I shook my head.

“You know how it is,” I told him. “On the island, each of us keeps to his own corner; the neighbors’ affairs don’t concern us—at least, they’re not supposed to,” I added, remembering Amélie.

The journalist frowned.

“It’s a mistake,” he said. “We can’t afford to shut our eyes these days to what goes on around us. Well, I’m sorry I disturbed you—”

He braced his hands on the chair arms as if about to rise, then apparently had a second thought.

“I may as well tell you. For a year or more, some pretty queer rumors have been circulating about the gentleman over on the point. You may have heard he employed foreign labor to build his house.”

“Foreign?”

“Italians, brought from the Midi. Doesn’t that seem odd to you? We have the best masons in France right here in Brittany.”

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"Perhaps the contractor preferred cheap labor," I suggested.

"That may be so. It was what I thought at the time. But I've just picked up a bit of information concerning some of the things these Italians built. A concrete wine cellar, for instance."

"Why shouldn't Monsieur D—— build a wine cellar?"

"Yes, why shouldn't he? Has it occurred to you that there are not half a dozen cellars on this island? Most people with wine to store build a granite out-house for the purpose, and keep it above ground. They don't waste time and money blasting a cellar in the rock, lining it with concrete and vaulting it over like a bomb shelter."

"Perhaps he meant it as a bomb shelter."

My visitor gave a short laugh.

"Who's going to bomb this island? The British? No, he claims he built it for wine—for four hundred thousand francs' worth of wine, enough to last him for some time, I'd say. As it happens, not a bottle has turned up as yet."

I remarked that it must be a very big cellar.

"That's just the point," the journalist agreed. "Here you have this cellar, built like a casemate, not conveniently located—it stands a hundred yards from the house—with space enough to store—well, a lot of

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things besides wine bottles. Doesn't that suggest anything to you?"

It was my turn to laugh, as I thought of Alain Lebras.

"Don't tell me it's another Cagoulard?"

"Yes—laugh at the idea," the journalist said bitterly. "That's the accepted line. These Cagoulards, this handful of misguided patriots, not to be taken seriously. Hush it up, *classez l'affaire; Marianne est bonne fille*, not an ounce of rancor. She'll forgive and forget. And Monsieur D—— can stock his cellar with what he pleases, on a point that commands the entrance to the river across the way—a submarine base in the last war and where convoys used to gather. He can own three sea-going speed-boats *built in Germany* and spend his winters abroad, no one knows where—"

"I thought he owned a factory," I interrupted.

"It failed eight years ago, left him without a cent. You see?" The journalist got up from his chair. "Maybe there is nothing in it. Maybe I am seeing smoke where there is no fire. But I'm not going to shut my eyes. I haven't the right. So long as I know—and I *know*"—he clenched his big fist—"that there are men in this country, in high places, and some of them close to the government, who'd prefer to let Hitler take over France, rather than let Blum return to power." He paused impressively: "I tell you I'll hound them

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to the last, so long as I have breath in my body and the strength to hold a pen!" His vehemence strangled him. He broke off with a gasping cough. "I hope I haven't startled you," he said, holding out his hand. "That is what I meant by keeping an eye on your neighbor's business. Nowadays it is a duty. If you hear anything of interest, I'd be grateful if you would pass it on to me. Also"—he paused in the doorway—"please keep this to yourself. If there is anything in it, it had best not get about."

I kept my own counsel about what the journalist had told me and did not speak of his visit to anyone, even to Marie-Anaik, however much I longed for her opinion. But within a week something took place that may have been an echo of that evening call. Alain Lebras burst into the farm kitchen one evening, so excited by the news he brought that he could not find a French word and had to deliver his story in Breton.

"He says the gendarmes have been over at the point," Marie-Anaik translated.

"No, not the gendarmes, the secret police, a whole boatload straight from Paris," Alain corrected. Whereupon he relapsed into Breton again, and it took five minutes of questions and translating before I succeeded in getting the entire story.

The police from Paris had made a "raid" that afternoon on the manufacturer's property. They had gone

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all over the place, had insisted on seeing everything, and had questioned the servants, including Désir the caretaker, who had been greatly upset by the experience.

“What did they find?”

“Nothing—nothing at all,” Alain said disgustedly. “Monsieur D—— received them himself. He showed them around and kept laughing all the time, Désir said, and joking with the men. When they finished he asked them in and treated them to wine and cakes, just like visitors. One of them told the chief at the Semaphore that it had all been a mistake. They came all the way from Paris for nothing. He said Monsieur D—— was a very nice man. A ‘nice man’”—Alain thrust a generous dose of snuff up his nostrils with his thumb and swore explosively. “*Mal es Doué, le sacré Gangular!*”

## 4. Mounting Tide

JUNE passed into July, with crashing thunderstorms and bursts of rain. The most violent of all broke on the morning of the *Fête Dieu*, when the open-air altars were ready for the Procession, and Amélie and the neighbor girls had worked since daybreak, laying down a mosaic of flower petals in patterns of pink, blue and lavender on the road near the altar steps. The storm lasted only a few minutes, rushing over the island with hurricane strength, but when it had gone, all the florists' patient work lay in ruins. Fragments of broken vases littered the steps of the altars, the fresh white altar cloths were stained and crumpled rags, and dirty welts of petals and hailstones rolled together lay like sand ripples across the path.

Amélie was near tears. "Not a flower left in the gardens. What will the *Bon Dieu* think of us?"

Marie-Anaik took another view of it.

"You did your part. It's not your fault if the *Bon*

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*Dieu* shirks His. If He can't respect His own *fête*—”

But to Amélie the storm was the Demon's work.

“It's a sign,” she said with an ominous shake of the head. “Mark my words, it's a sign.”

There were other signs, besides those of the heavens. Each day the world came closer to the island. As in 1938, conversations bristled with foreign words. The year before, neighbors said, “Will we have to go to war over those Checko-people?” Now they were asking, “Are they going to make us fight about Dantzig?” Poland—it was “way off somewhere in the east.” Who cared what happened to Poland? Why fight for anything but France?”

“I wish they'd give Hitler Poland and be done with it,” Anne-Elise said crossly. “Then maybe he'd leave us in peace.”

“Maybe he would and maybe he wouldn't,” her mother said thoughtfully. “This Hitler looks to me like Séverin's bull: he's in their clover patch today; tomorrow, he'll be in ours. Though when that day comes, if it does come,” she added with a touch of humor, “it's to be hoped French clover will be in a better state than mine!” Shouldering her wooden fork, she trotted off to the field where the clover hay lay black and matted from the rains.

Marie-Anaik never lost time in gloomy imaginings. Her days were busy ones, what with the usual round

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of milking, cleaning stables, pegging down cows and sheep in a dozen different places daily, hoeing, weeding, turning the hay, getting meals for the family, feeding the hens, ducks and rabbits—yet she always found time to read the press and listen to the radio. She even found time to drop across the lane for a moment's conversation now and then on her way to and from the fields.

She would sit on the edge of her chair, “resting,” her mallet on her knees and her strong little hands poised lightly on the chair arms. (I always marveled at those hands of hers. They stayed so shapely, in spite of all the heavy work they did.) In former summers, she used to bring me bits of domestic news—the enmity of rival broods of hens, the strange plant she had sown as a melon seed, and that had shot up a tall stalk and was putting out starry blossoms. Or it might be “that one’s” latest blunder, told with the amused tolerance she reserves for young animals, children and men in general. But this summer, we spoke always of the war.

“The last war came like a thunderbolt,” she would say. “This one is different, it keeps creeping up on us, like the tide.” Or again, “In the last one, we never knew what was happening. Papers wouldn’t come for days; at times you almost forgot there was a war. Nowadays, you can’t get away from the news, but,”

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wearily, "I don't know that we're any better informed."

In all our talk, Marie-Anaik never allowed herself to think of war as the inevitable solution. "If they set their heads to work, they'll find a way out," she said hopefully. "Though it seems to be easier for men to use their fists than their brains. Take Alain—as good a worker as you'd find anywhere, but he can't sell a calf or rent a pasture without getting into a fight about it. That's why I have to do it all. This Hitler . . . why don't they get him a wife?"

Invariably, our conversations ended on a hopeful note. "Remember how we worried last year and it all came to nothing? Maybe we'll give up the Poles the way we did the Czechs—though it won't be anything to be proud of," Marie-Anaik never failed to add. Still, peace was peace. Was it not better to save a continent from war, even at the expense of a nation or two? Was it or wasn't it? Somehow we never found a satisfactory answer. At that point, Marie-Anaik would remember her cows—"Ma Doué, il faut changer les vaches"—and the following day we would take up the argument all over again.

In July, my sister arrived from America by way of England. She brought us pictures of what was happening on the other side of the Channel, one hundred miles to the north of us. England, too, hoped for peace

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while preparing for war. People there were saying as we did: "This is like last year," or, "This is like the summer of 1914." England would have one million men under arms by August. That was a comforting thought for all of us. This time—if war came—England would not have to extemporize an army. This time the democracies were prepared. And if Russia joined forces with France and Britain, well, the war was won before it started. Indeed, there might never be a war.

Like everyone else, I clutched at that hope, and with it came the temptation to escape into the immediate present—the sun, the sea, the lazy summer days. Push a shrimp net along the beach at low tide, fish for coppery *vieilles* from our own pet rock that dropped sheer into deep water, with a narrow ledge to stand on, and a pool in a convenient hollow for our catch. Or simply lie on the rocks in the sun and imagine the world contained nothing but a sky of drifting clouds and the glassy ocean, blurred here and there with wandering patches of ripples. But all the while, underneath our lazy forgetfulness, we were conscious of leading a double life. Our island security floated on dark world currents like a ship. We could never completely forget what lay beneath and around it.

Evenings, when we sat by the wood fire, the dog at our feet, world voices surged in to us, over the radio.

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Sometimes we shut our ears to them and hunted music across the dial: festival music at Lucerne, opera in Milan, symphonies from Berlin and Munich and promenade concerts from London. The old internationale of music was still there; it, too, offered an escape. But not for long. A shift of the needle and the voices were back again: "Britain will stand firm against aggressors. Britain maintains her continental commitments"; "Germany will accept no compromises; the Corridor situation is hideous, intolerable . . . unconditional incorporation in the Reich"; "The Corridor is Poland's lung. Deprived of it, she would stifle." Warning voices and a babel of tongues. A voice speaking French—did it come from Paris or Berlin, or perhaps Rome or Ankara? Language was no longer a key. Distant Chungking sent off waves of fairy music, followed by broadcasts in western tongues. Tokyo spoke English and German. . . .

Listening, we forgot the island. Our granite walls melted like sand. We were out in the world again, groping through a night of tension and hate, hideous with voices shouting: War! And yet we missed two voices from the chorus: Russia and the U. S. A. For days and days, each time we tuned in on Moscow, there was that same woman speaker, suavely hermetic, concerned with one topic, and only one: the Moscow Agricultural Exposition. America, too, seemed obliv-

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ous of everything but her two Fairs and the coming elections. Though once, a great voice from the past spoke across the night and the ocean. The familiar words rang like a warning through the still Brittany night: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

July and August wore on. Two million men under arms in Germany. War maneuvers in France and Britain. Test black-outs in Paris and London. The French and British military missions were in Moscow. More frenzied speeches from the Reich, to a surf-like thunder of *heils*: "No conference on the Dantzig question, no compromises, only one settlement." Polish "atrocities," frontier incidents. . . .

On the island, people began stopping you on the path. "What do *you* think?" At the grocer's, the baker's, the butcher's, on the launch crossing to the mainland: "Do you think there is any hope?" "Well, so long as they keep on talking . . ."

Amélie flapped in and out at all hours, bringing news that daily grew more dismal.

—"They're calling up the reservists in small groups, a man at a time. The gendarmes brought Annie Prigent's man his notice yesterday. He's forty-eight if he's a day."

"The coast-guards' families at the Semaphore have

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been notified to move out. Sailors from the Navy are coming to take it over."

—“Captain B——, the Colonel’s son, leaves tonight for Nancy to join his regiment. He came yesterday for a month’s vacation, but they called him back this morning.”

Of all the neighbors, only Marie-Anaik met Amélie’s croakings with an unshaken front.

“We saw that happen a year ago, and yet we didn’t have a war,” she repeated stoutly. She even refused to lay in a stock of sugar, as nearly everyone was doing. Sugar furnished Amélie with another news item.

“They’re going to ration sugar. The grocer won’t sell more than two pounds to anyone. He says he has orders from the Prefecture.”

“*Ya*, that’s what he tells *you*,” Alain Lebras broke in.” He sold twenty pounds to the Colonel’s lady, right this afternoon. I ought to know: I delivered it myself. The rich won’t lack for sugar—even in wartime.”

Marie-Anaik turned on him, eyes flashing.

“‘Wartime,’ you say? You’ve lost your head like the rest of them, Alain Lebras. It isn’t wartime yet, and”—firmly—“I’m not going to give up hope, not till I see the flags on the Semaphore and hear the tocsin. And even then—”

On the fifteenth of August, Marie-Anaik’s eldest son came home from China, just promoted a petty

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officer in the Navy. After eighteen months on a Yangtze gunboat he was due for three months' leave. But it was leave without "papers," he said, when he stepped across the lane, thin and bronzed in his neat blue uniform, with a new gold stripe on his sleeve, to pay us a visit.

"They're not giving us leave, these days. Told me to go home and see the family while I could, and wait for a telegram. All the ships at Toulon are under steam. Any news from the Captain? I bet he won't get home before it breaks."

"I'm glad Yves is with the Captain," Marie-Anaik said, and her voice faltered. But she found it again, to catch up 'Guitte, her daughter-in-law, who was complaining "they" had no right to take her man away again after he'd been gone nearly two years in China. It wasn't fair, she said; she might as well be a widow.

"You ought to have thought of that before you married him, *ma fille*. Our men aren't in the Navy for their pleasure."

That afternoon I overtook the Colonel on my way home from the village. He held a copy of the *Jour* and was reading as he walked.

"This Russian delay—it's an outrage!" he fumed. "We ought to say to them: Do you want a pact or don't you? You don't? Then, *bonsoir, Messieurs.*" The paper crackled in his blue-veined hands. "We

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never should have gone there in the first place. I don't approve and never did. What has France in common with such people?"

"Perhaps we need—" I began.

"Need whom? The Russians? Of course we don't need them. Our armament industry is the finest in the world. Hitler says so himself. Our army"—stiffly—"I know our army, Madame, and you forget we have the Line. My son is there now. The Russians? Remember the last war. The 'steam-roller'? Bah! Brest-Litovsk, the Russian bonds. I still have a drawerful. And now this government of ours makes a pact with Monsieur Stalin!" He hissed the word.

"But Britain, too, wants the pact."

The Colonel turned on me.

"Britain, Madame, leads our government by the nose!"

He stamped through his gate, his parting salute so sketchy it was almost as if he shook his fist.

The afternoon of August 22, my sister and I went shopping on the mainland. I shall always associate that afternoon with baby-blue flannel. It was the only wool the shopkeeper had in stock, he said; the darker shades had all been requisitioned. I can see his hands, his fat red fingers spread fan-wise on the folds of acid blue, as he leaned across the counter, and announced, his voice thick with excitement:

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"Have you heard, Mesdames? The Russians are with the Boches!"

It was as if the shop had suddenly blown up. I heard my voice saying sharply, "Nonsense, it can't be true," while the man across the counter kept insisting, "It's a fact. The radio says it's a fact. I heard it at noon. They're signing a pact, Hitler and Stalin together." A plump woman in silk mourning who was looking at underwear declared she had heard it too, and added with a sniff, "I must say I'm not surprised. It's what I've always said—"

"Well, it surprised *me*," the shopkeeper blurted. "Floored me, that's what it did. *Bon Dieu*, I've always stood up for the Russians, first and last and all the time, and it cost me more than one customer. Never dreamed they would let us down like this."

An old woman in a butterfly coiffe put down her basket by the counter. She presumed we were talking about the war. Was it true that war was coming?

"Coming so fast, grand'mère, nothing on earth can stop it," the shopman said bluntly. "What's more, it looks as if we'd have to fight the whole of Europe!"

The old woman clutched the handles of her basket.

"*Ma Doué, ma Doué*, what will become of us?"

Oddly enough, we had planned to end the afternoon with a call at the home of a French Senator, a leader of the extreme Left in French politics, and one of the

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stauncest advocates of Franco-Russian rapprochement in the region. I had known him for years. His wife, who had spent her youth in America, was almost a compatriot. How would the old man take the news?

At the little railroad station it lacked nearly an hour of train time. On the platform, engineer, train crew and station men stood in a group, engaged in heated discussion. It sounded like a meeting in the afternoon hush.

"If Russia has done this, she's got her reasons," the baggage clerk was saying.

"*Her* reasons, but what about ours? Are they the same?"

"Of course they're the same. Russia is looking ahead. She's taking a long view."

"Well, she ought to be mighty sure of what she sees."

"I'm against Hitler and the Nazis. We've got to beat them," the engineer said slowly. "That's all I can see."

"Well, isn't Russia against Hitler? This may be just a clever move."

"It's so damn clever I can't see it."

And like a refrain: "Where is the working class to stand? Why didn't she let us in? What made her spring it on us like this?"

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"Perhaps she was obliged to. Perhaps there wasn't any other way." This was the baggage clerk again.

"Maybe there wasn't. But that doesn't help us any. It doesn't change the fact that we've got to fight Hitler, and now Russia won't be with us."

It was the sort of talk I was to hear over and over again during the bewildered days that followed the Russo-German Pact.

The man we had set out to see lived inland, half a dozen miles from the coast, on wooded heights overlooking the river. A landscape "choked with trees," Marie-Anaik would have called it, with her island antipathy for trees except as a windbreak. The Senator's house—it was only a cottage—stood behind a hedge of apple trees that hid it from the road.

An old woman in a peasant cap met us at the door. At her call, the Senator came in from the garden, a chubby grandchild on his arm. He wore a Brittany sailor's blouse of heavy wool, and with his stocky body, his rough gray hair and drooping mustache, one might have taken him for a retired sea captain, instead of a veteran of French politics—the "Tiger of the Left," as he was sometimes called.

I thought he wore a singularly untroubled look as he greeted us, genially ironical.

"So it takes a war to drag you away from your island on an August afternoon?"

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Was it possible that even he, Russia's strong friend and supporter, had not been informed?

"You haven't heard?" Without further preamble, I told him the news.

He listened, frowning.

"What cock-and-bull story is this?" Then his face cleared. "Don't give a thought to it. It's the announcer's misinterpretation. He must have meant the commercial agreement. That is nothing new. Germany already has one with France. It's a willful misinterpretation, of course," he added scornfully. "Another attempt of our 'friends' at the Right to drive in a wedge between France and Russia at this critical moment. It is part of the campaign for another 'Munich.' Yes, that certainly is the explanation."

But I could see the idea bothered him.

"The abominable thing about it all," he went on, "when this story is disproved—as it certainly will be disproved—there will always remain an unpleasant something, a little smoke, a vague reek of treachery. The authors of the rumor know it. Calumny leaves a stain."

After that he fell silent. While his wife gave us local news—five hundred more reservists called up that day in the region, the plan to evacuate women and children from the cities (their own little village had received orders to make room for two thousand refugees), our

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host took no part in the conversation. His head on his hand, he sat staring through the open window, lost in thought. Suddenly he burst out:

"It's lugubrious! It's sinister!" And with prophetic emphasis, "We are entering the tunnel. When we emerge—who knows?—it may be even blacker than before."

How many times since, have I recalled that image: the tunnel . . .

Just where his thoughts were driving, I could not foresee. But a little later he said slowly, as if to himself,

"If Hitler has asked Stalin to consider a non-aggression pact for the peace of Europe, how can Stalin, who desires peace, refuse?"

When we took our leave, I could not resist asking, "If a Russo-German pact really does exist, what then?"

The Senator's eyes gleamed beneath his heavy brows. He answered with the dogged conviction of his Breton blood.

"I trust my friends."

Two fresh news items awaited us that evening when we reached the island. One of them—a flesh-and-blood item—met us at the top of the Semaphore hill, escorted by Marie-Anaik, her face beaming.

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"Yves! I thought you were in China!"

Marie-Anaik's son flashed us his mother's quick smile.

"Slipped on a ladder and cracked my ankle. I'm all right now. The Captain would have kept me on board, but we met the *Roussel* at Penang, so he sent me home."

"And home you'll stay for a while," Marie-Anaik said firmly.

"Not if there's going to be a war."

"Seventeen, and he wants to go to war. He's as bad as the Colonel. Seventeen and seventy. . . . Do you know the old man plans to take up service again? He telegraphed the Ministry to ask if they would have him."

"Yes, and hollered so, you could hear him all the way up the hill," completed Alain Lebras, who had joined us. "They say he had a stroke."

"People with strokes don't holler, Papa."

"Well, maybe it was a fit," Alain conceded. "But even Madame la Colonelle was scared. She sent for Amélie to help get him to bed."

I saw the Colonel the following day. He looked somewhat pale and shaky, but he was still "hollering."

"Those—those Bolsheviks—" he could scarcely get out the word. "This insult to the army—never such a

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thing in history. And the Military Commission still there! This government of ours—" His wrath choked him. "We can't touch the Russians yet, Madame, but their friends in this country we *can* touch. We'll make them pay for this!"

## 5. Waiting for the Tocsin

A PEALING bell waked me—clang, clang, clang. My first thought: wind from the south, the only wind that brings the sound of bells. Then my heart skipped a beat—the tocsin! I leaped out of bed and hurried to the window. The signal staff at the Semaphore was bare. No mobilization flags. The bell I heard was pealing for a wedding or a baptism. Ordinary church bells.

But across the lane a poster, still wet with paste, clung to the green door of Marie-Anaik's garden. A knot of people stood about it, reading. I slipped on a coat and ran out to join them.

"Immediate Call for Reservists. Those whose mobilization cards bear the numbers 1, 5, or 6 should report at once at their mobilization centers." It stood there in black and white, beneath two crossed flags. Not General Mobilization yet, but a serious beginning. Even Marie-Anaik lacked the courage to make her customary remark about this being like "last year" . . .

## WAITING FOR THE TOCSIN

The old woman who brings telegrams stood in the group, her leather wallet on her arm.

"They're still calling out the 'specialists,' one by one," she said. "I've been up all night carrying summons. My poor feet."

Marie-Anaik carried her off for a bowl of coffee in the kitchen.

"What about your own boys?" she asked.

The old woman's shoulders crumpled.

"They leave today. It's—it's a terrible thing." She sniffed back her tears and got to her feet. "I mustn't let myself go, not with all these 'officials' to deliver." She showed us the bundle of yellow envelopes.

Marie-Anaik went with her to the gate.

"Poor soul, she wouldn't let her boys go to sea, after her man was drowned. Now they're both in the army," she said afterwards. "Thank God, my own will be spared the trenches. I'd never have a minute's peace if I knew they were there—down in the ground, like being buried alive. The sea is different. It's cleaner and there's air—and besides, it's the life they're used to. And if they have to . . . to go, they go quickly," she added with a shiver.

It came over me then, that on the island there were no crippled veterans of the last war, no sailors' graves. A stone tablet in the porch of the church, with a list

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of names, dates and ships, and the word: torpedoed. That was all. "They go quickly—"

Yet, as Marie-Anaik said, the sea was "their life." Ships sailed on, in war as in peace, navy and merchant ships alike. Even for the crews of merchantmen there was no shock of transition from civilian life to military, not even a change of dress. For some, gold shoulder-straps on the blue uniform, a bigger anchor on the cap—that would be their mobilization. I, too, was glad my "man" followed the sea.

That afternoon Marie-Anaik's Auguste received his summons calling him to Brest. An hour later, he crossed the lane to say good-by, his wife on his arm and his three-year-old son clinging to his hand. He seemed very casual about it all, though the bottle of champagne we emptied to speed him on his way may have had something to do with it.

"I've had ten days," he said cheerfully. "They can't take them from me now. And when my wife gets my new 'month' from the pay office she'll forget her troubles. That's all the women care about, anyhow."

But his wife sat red-eyed and silent, so near tears that even Marie-Anaik could not find heart to scold her.

"Think how lucky we are to have Auguste near home," she encouraged. "If war comes, he'll not be off in China, nobody knows where."

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"He'll be nobody knows where, even if he is near home," Auguste's wife said bitterly. "Somewhere on the sea"—"

I have no distinct recollection of the days that followed, whether they slipped by or whether they dragged. No one read the papers any more—their news was stale before it reached us. Even Amélie's croakings found few listeners. They gave too limited a picture. The radio ticked off events hour by hour like a clock of catastrophe: German divisions pour into East Prussia; France calls up another class of reservists; Britain votes emergency powers; the Pope appeals for peace; Roosevelt appeals for peace; German troops mass on the Polish frontier . . .

The radio warned us to clear our attics of rubbish and strew the floor with two inches of sand, to prepare our black-out curtains and choose a corner away from windows where we might take shelter. Gas bombs, we were told, could be detected by their odor: mustard, geranium, rotting grain, spice-cake . . .

At the port, Le Greguer's launches swang idle at their moorings. Their crews had left for Brest. Only one still ran to the mainland, with a cripple at the wheel and a small boy to help him with the ropes. Twenty sailors from the Navy took over the Semaphore. Civilians could no longer telephone to the

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mainland. Telegrams had to be stamped at the *mairie* before the post office would accept them.

Though neighbors still gathered on the hillock by the lighthouse to talk over events, no one dared speak of hope any longer. Faces now were as dour as Amélie's. People ceased to ask "Will it come?" They said "When?" In the shipping news one morning, I read that the Captain's ship had put in at Singapore, on the way home from China. It would remain there "until future developments." On the sea as well as on land, everywhere men were waiting.

Late in the afternoon of August 27, war knocked at the door of *Cœur à l'Ancre*. It gave a peremptory knock—three hollow thuds of the iron knocker. The *garde-champêtre* stood on the threshold, the island's one policeman who is also the village cobbler. He wore his badge of office on his sleeve—a brass plate with the word "police" engraved in capitals—and carried a sheet of official-looking paper. Behind him on the path stood a stranger in a horizon-blue uniform.

"Madame, I regret to inform you—" he began. In the pause—only a second or two—that followed, I had time to imagine the things he might be "regretting to inform" me. In a vivid flash I saw one of the pictures Marie-Anaik had given me of the last war: the mayor in his tri-colored sash toiling up the Semaphore hill on his way to bring news—the only dreaded

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news—to one of the granite cottages. Did the guard, too—?

“—regret to inform you . . . we have come to requisition your house.”

In my relief, I could have laughed. In fact, I think I did laugh. The guard, who evidently had steeled himself for an outburst of a different sort, stared in utter amazement. But my relief was short-lived; it gave way to dismay as the meaning of his words sank in.

“Requisition . . . the house?”

“For soldiers.” The guard recovered his aplomb and held out the paper. “Here is the order. ‘First house, west-southwest of the Light: Post Number Three.’”

It was clearly specified in the careful script of some official scribe. There was even a neat pen-and-ink drawing of the house, unmistakable.

“I’ll give you a receipt that guarantees your compensation—fifteen centimes a day for each man; twenty for each officer,” the guard went on.

“How many soldiers do you intend—”

At this, the man in uniform stepped forward.

“Sixteen—that is, seventeen with me. I’m Gonidec the Sergeant.” He raised a finger to his cap with a gesture towards the gate: “The men are waiting outside.”

As he spoke, a cart creaked into sight at the end of

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the path, loaded with baskets and two long coffin-like boxes.

"But where do you expect to put them?" Normally the house was a tight fit for three. Seventeen men! The Sergeant stepped inside the door and cast a rapid look about the living-room.

"We can always put down straw for the men," he said. "But I think you'd better take out most of your things." His glance included the books, the lamps, the jars of flowers. "We'll try not to get in your way more than we have to. I'm sorry we have to bother you, but"—with a shrug—"que voulez-vous, c'est la guerre. And now, if you like, I'll give you a hand with the furniture, while the men finish unloading."

But we had reckoned without Marie-Anaik. Before the Sergeant had time to remove his jacket, we heard her voice in the garden.

"What's this I hear? Quartering a regiment on two ladies? And the house next door standing empty!"

Gonidec slipped his shoulders into his jacket again, and the guard, who had been sitting on a bench by the door, got to his feet and produced his paper.

"Military orders," he rapped out. "This house was used for troops in the last war. You can read it yourself."

Marie-Anaik waved aside the sheet.

"I haven't my glasses. The house was empty then.

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Now it isn't." She turned to the Sergeant. "I'm sure the ladies are glad to take you in. But you can see for yourself, you'll be putting them out. It won't be comfortable for them or for you. Next door, you'll have the whole place to yourself. It's a fine new house, bigger than this one, and there's no furniture to get in your way."

The Sergeant scratched his cheek.

"I don't see how—" he began. "The order says—"

"Orders can be changed," Marie-Anaik said stoutly. "Jannik here"—she nodded to the guard—"will telephone the mayor from the Semaphore. Mind you tell him just how things are, Jannik, my man. And while we're waiting for the answer, Mr. Sergeant"—persuasively—"there's cider in the kitchen and a pot of coffee on the stove!"

Marie-Anaik had taken things in hand. Before the guard returned with the mayor's consent, she marshaled the women of the neighborhood to collect beds, mattresses and blankets for the soldiers.

"We can't put the boys on straw when we all have beds to spare. Poor lads, they'll be sleeping on straw soon enough."

When Amélie objected, "They'll spoil my beds; I won't have anything left for tourists," she met with a stinging rejoinder.

"Tourists! It's refugees you'll be taking in, and

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maybe soldiers too. I'm surprised they didn't come to you first—alone in that big house of yours, with plenty of room." That sent Amélie scurrying home, to bring the beds before more was asked for.

Marie-Anaik's face was brighter than I had seen it for days, as she hurried from kitchen to lane, a wooden cider jug on her arm, a basket full of glasses, a broom.

"No, don't move your men in till I've given the place a good sweeping," she told the Sergeant. "The house is clean and new, but it's full of plaster dust."

Seated astride the wall, a cigarette slanting from his lips, the Sergeant let her take command. A Breton himself, he was used to the ways of Brittany women.

I missed Alain Lebras from the picture. Instead of lending a hand, as I expected him to do—Alain loves to be in the midst of things—he stayed in the background from the first, looking on, a mere spectator. Finally he disappeared altogether. I found him later in the back garden, whittling absently at a broken rake handle. His face was black with gloom. If a sixty-year-old man can be said to sulk, that was what Alain was doing.

"She's given them my house," he growled. But for all its anger, his voice carried a note of real unhappiness.

"Alain's house" deserves a parenthesis. To begin with, the house was not his. But he had built it, and

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he loved every stone of it. If sheer love and a year of days and nights filled with one obsession count for anything, then Alain might well say the house belonged to him. It stood in the field next door, like a younger sister of *Cœur à l'Ancre's*. A little longer, with an additional chimney (a "three-funneled" house, instead of a "two-funneled" one, to use the island term), it had the same deep windows, the three-foot granite walls, the slate roof that in Brittany houses keeps the steep slant of thatch. In short, it was the type of house men built in other days when "masons were masons," as Alain says, and when no one was in a hurry. An honest house, that fitted into the landscape like a rock, and looked as if it had always stood there. Yet the mortar was scarcely dry.

The house was Alain's dream come true. Alain always "had ideas"—even Marie-Anaik admitted that—but there had been pitifully few chances in his long hard life to give them substance. He had to content himself with little attempts here and there, not all of them happy, as when he set rows of sea shells in a friend's stone fireplace "just to make it pretty," or bordered my flowerbeds with large granite pebbles, carefully selected as to color and shape, and brought by the barrowful from the beach, as a "surprise." But Alain is a master mason, and when I gave him a free hand with the new gate of *Cœur à l'Ancre*, he built

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one of the handsomest in the north, a little masterpiece of stone, mortar and design. But his ambition was to build a house.

In the summer of 1938, the chance he longed for came. A friend bought the strip of meadow land adjoining mine. She, too, had fallen in love with the island, and she wanted a house like *Cœur à l'Ancre*, an authentic Brittany house. That was Alain's opportunity. He offered to build it for her.

No one but Cécile would ever have embarked on such an impractical venture. But that is Cécile all over—impractical ideas appeal to her. For all her French prudence, she has a Frenchman's, and an aristocrat's, love of risk. Cécile is an aristocrat, though I always hesitate to give her her title. As Marie-Anaik says, "Madame Cécile is just like the rest of us; you would never take her for a 'white.'" As for Alain Lebras, he worships her, whatever her origin. Thanks to her, he realized his dream.

The building of the house merits a chapter of its own. The very day the deed was signed, Alain began digging the foundations. He was architect, contractor and mason all in one. He drew up the plans—in his head—ordered building materials and engaged masons and carpenters. Truth compels me to add that Marie-Anaik did the actual hiring and paying: she took over all the business details from the first.

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The house—that-Alain-built drew the curiosity of the entire island for months. People came from everywhere to see it. Local contractors scoffed and predicted catastrophe. If the “peasants” ever got it built, they said, it would cost a fortune. Think of it—three-foot granite walls! Yet the house rose rapidly, in record time, and though the contractors held to their skepticism as a professional duty, the neighborhood admired. It was a handsome house.

Yet drama was not lacking during the building. Alain, like most creators, lived with the vision of the completed work; moreover, as Marie-Anaik always pointed out, he had no knack of dealing with men. He worked them like a slave-driver, was overbearing and short of temper, and made mountains of every blunder. Workmen were always throwing down their tools and threatening to leave. Some did leave, though generally Marie-Anaik and the cider barrel succeeded in smoothing matters over, at least until the next outburst. Many cider barrels were emptied before the house was completed; indeed, cider came near provoking one major tragedy, when Charlot the mason passed out with his last bottle on the cement floor he was laying and ten sacks of good cement were wasted. Alain had to be restrained bodily that time, or he would have done murder.

“He couldn’t take it harder if the house belonged

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to him," the neighbors said. Since it obviously did not, they concluded he must be making a fortune out of it. Not one of them would ever have credited the amazing truth—that Alain Lebras, architect, contractor, construction superintendent and general handy-man, refused all pay except for the work he did with his hands! Thirty francs a day when he hauled stones and dug foundations; forty when he worked as mason. That was "honest." He would accept no more. "You can't be paid for what you don't *do*," he said, and stuck to it, stubborn as any Breton peasant. But from the way he looked at the house, you knew where his reward lay. And so his dream took shape and body, stone by stone, until at last it stood complete. The carpenter finished putting-in the glass of the eight-paned windows; the plumber soldered the last cistern pipe; one day Alain turned the key in the lock of the massive oak door. The house was finished.

That happened early in August, 1939. Three weeks later the soldiers came, and Alain took refuge in my back garden, with a look on his face I had seen there only once before—when the accordion with which he had accompanied the *giboulées* and *derobées* of the neighborhood for forty years, gave its final wheeze.

"She's given them my house," he mourned, slashing at the broken rake handle. From his tone I under-

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stood that what had happened was worse than war; it was desecration.

"They'll drive nails in the walls and splinter the floors with their hob-nails and dirty the paint and smash the windows—"

I did my best to comfort him, reminding him the men were Bretons like himself, people with good homes and sober habits. They might be careless, but fresh paint, soap and a scrubbing brush could efface whatever damage they might do. French soldiers were not vandals.

Alain refused to be consoled.

"I know soldiers," he said glumly, and began his lament all over again. "They'll stop up the sink and the toilet and smash the stair rail for kindling and like as not set the place on fire—"

I fled at that, for his pessimism was catching. I began to feel qualms myself. . . . His misery would not last long, I felt confident; too many things were happening on the other side of the wall.

Out in the lane, the Sergeant's men had finished unloading the cart and sat smoking in the grass. Nearly all wore wooden sabots and their ordinary clothes, though some had added a vague military touch —a leg-band, a broad leather belt and here and there a *képi*. One little fellow had on a pair of stained and patched horizon-blue breeches, much too big, that

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bagged about his bare calves like plus-fours. Their uniforms, it seemed, were "somewhere on the way," together with their blankets and their cotton sleeping bags.

"But we have coats for the sentinels," the Sergeant said. He and the Corporal were the only two who boasted complete uniforms.

Like the Sergeant, Corporal Blanc was a man in his forties. A horticulturist in civil life, he had already seen four years of war: "gassed in the Vosges, froze a foot in Argonne, and climbed on the *billard* (operating table) three times after Verdun." Yet here he was, in service again, after twenty years. "Just twenty years today, Madame, since I took off these togs for the last time. Never thought I'd be putting them on again."

The men appeared dazed and did little talking. They made me think of torn-up plants, the soil still clinging to their roots. When they spoke of the war it was only to echo what the Corporal had said: "We never thought it would happen again."

All but one were Bretons, from districts on the mainland, within a radius of one hundred miles from the island. The exception, a tall fellow in a raincoat, walked nervously up and down, chewing an unlighted cigarette and kicking at the stones in the path.

"What sort of a dump is this? Looks like the jumping-off place," he croaked. I recognized the accent, the

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throaty drawl of the Paris faubourgs. “*Ohé, la petite,*” to Marie-Anaik’s daughter, “is this sour stuff all you’ve got? Can’t you scare up a drop of wine?”

He also told the gallery no one was going to get *him* to stand sentry duty that night. “Let one of the hicks do it. They’re fresh from their hay. I’ve had no sleep since day before yesterday.” He kept repeating it, his voice raised aggressively, his eye on the Sergeant. Gonidec affected not to hear, but at last said good-naturedly:

“Cut it and take a nap till you’re called. Your bed’s ready. Like me to tuck you in?” The hoary pleasantry brought a chuckle from the Bretons. The laugh was on the Parisian. He hastened to fling back the ball.

“Sure I’ll turn in,” and with an amiable leer at the women who stood grouped together on the outskirts—“That’s what you’re waiting for, isn’t it, ladies?” He threw out his chest. “One or all, I’m your man.”

The girls giggled, Amélie bridled and Marie-Anaik, who had just appeared with a basket of vegetables on her arm, engaged him crisply.

“If that’s city talk, young man, we can do without it.”

“Oh, he’s all right,” the Sergeant said when the child of the faubourgs had taken his crabbing elsewhere. “I know his kind. He’s lonesome.”

By nightfall, the newcomers were settled in their

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quarters. The neighbors had gone home; but steps still echoed in the lane—a measured heavy tread I was to hear day in, day out, for months to come. Above the wall, the point of a bayonet traveled slowly from right to left. A sentry at the door of *Cœur à l'Ancre!* A second sentinel stood on the hillock, by the path to the lighthouse: overcoat, helmet and rifle, a martial silhouette against the evening sky. Only an hour before he had been a civilian among civilians, a peasant in sabots, seated in the grass. Now he was a soldier. That is the French soldier, I reflected; he puts on war as he puts on his uniform. He develops no second personality as the German does (a fact I was to verify later); he remains himself. Collectively he may lack the wooden perfection of the German or the smartness of the British: there is always a nonchalant something in his service that suggests the volunteer. But perhaps there lies the secret of his greatness, I thought,—a sign that the spirit of the French Revolution lives on in the Third Republic—the tradition of the citizen-soldier and the people in arms.

Across the lane, smoke rose in a straight blue line from Marie-Anaïk's chimney. In the kitchen, two long tables had been put end to end. Anne-Elise was setting out bowls, glasses and spoons, while her mother stood over a soup kettle big as a wash-boiler, that sent up savory steam in clouds.

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"I couldn't let the lads go hungry," she said, ladling out potatoes with a wooden spoon. "They haven't a pot to cook with, or a plate to eat on; and nothing in their stomachs since morning but bread and sausage."

Alain, too, was in the kitchen, seated at the end of the table, busy cutting bread for the soup. I judged he must have recovered from his recent despair, for he worked contentedly, piling up a mound of slicings on the oilcloth. As Marie-Anaïk spoke, he looked up with a grin.

"She's requisitioned herself," he said, and went on slashing at the round loaf.

On my way home, I ran into Amélie. She blew through the gate like a ship in a gale, shawl and bonnet-strings flying; almost, but not quite, speechless with dudgeon.

"That man—" she gasped. "Stopped me in the road. Asked me my name! I said to him, I said—"

"But he let you pass—"

"Of course he did. I told him what I thought of him—that fresh Parisian!"

The sentry stopped me too, by my own gate, but only to ask, "Tell me, Madame, what news tonight? Is the war any nearer?"

I could not tell him. For the first time in weeks, I had forgotten to listen to the radio.

## 6. *Aux Armes, Citoyens!*

TWO DAYS after the soldiers took over the house—that Alain-built, my sister and I started for Cherbourg. She had taken passage on a Canadian *Empress*, due to sail September 2. Would the ship keep to her schedule? We had no way of finding out. The agents telegraphed laconically, "Sailing uncertain."

Everyone we talked with, advised against the journey. Madame la Colonelle, whom we met at the post office, decreed we would never get beyond the Narrows. "The buses have stopped running. The railroads are requisitioned: you will not be allowed on trains. Trains cannot be encumbered with civilians." She stressed the last word.

I remarked that this was no pleasure trip. My sister had to reach her ship.

Madame la Colonelle lifted her eyebrows and chin, putting on what Alain Lebras would have called her "heads taller" expression.

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"I understand," she said sweetly. "In these terrible times she is eager to be safe at home."

Amélie predicted the war would overtake us on the way.

"They'll put you off in the fields with your baggage, or you'll be held up in Cherbourg for weeks. Cherbourg is one of the first places they'll bomb."

All Marie-Anaik's remarks were of a practical nature.

"Take plenty of food. And why don't you let my Yves go with you? He's a sturdy lad and you may be glad of someone to help with your things. You're sure to find no porters, and he's spoiling to get out and see what is happening."

So Yves went with us, in his blue serge Sunday suit—"made by a Chinese tailor my last trip to Shanghai," he dropped casually—and the patent-leather shoes no man in the Fleet would be without when he puts on his Sunday best.

"I won't be wearing these clothes very long," he confided, out of his mother's hearing. "If war comes, I'm going to sign up with the marines."

Contrary to Madame la Colonelle's predictions, we found a bus on the mainland, an ancient vehicle that stank and sputtered and advanced by leaps and bounds, but it brought us to the station after only a halt or two on the way. Trains ran on schedule; moreover, they

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were empty. In our car, we were the only passengers. Throughout the summer afternoon, our train jogged east and north through the peaceful Norman country, where herds of cattle grazed in the lush meadows and every station platform was piled with egg baskets, crates of cheeses and tier on tier of twenty-pound cakes of butter, as sunny gold in their gauze wrappings as the cowslips that dotted the fields. I tried to imagine war bursting on the quiet landscape—the eruption of steel monsters, the hideous noise and reek and dust among still green things and grazing cattle. But imagination failed me. I could not conjure up the picture.

Cherbourg at sunset was as I had last seen it: the day shift from the arsenal bicycling home through the streets, women in summer frocks on the café terraces—perhaps more men in uniforms among their escorts. And as at Toulon or Brest, the usual groups of blue-jackets, three or four at a time, rolling along the sidewalks, hands in pockets or arms linked together.

At the hotel we had no difficulty finding rooms. When we asked about the ship, we met a reassuring answer. "Why shouldn't she sail? The *Queen Mary* stopped in yesterday. Nothing has happened yet. And what if you should be held up for a few days? You will be comfortable here. Besides, Cherbourg is a good place to be in just now. You'll be well protected."

It was silly to be comforted by so little, but we had

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reached the stage where we grasped at any straw. We almost found the day's press from Paris reassuring because it said so little—dangerously little. After a dinner that sticks in my memory only because of Yves's excitement at sitting elbow to elbow with a three-star general, we felt cheered enough to take in a movie.

The film was pseudo-military, a time-worn regimental theme of the pre-World-War school in a new dress, with Fernandel as the private who dreams he becomes a colonel and behaves accordingly. Aimed at an audience of sailors and soldiers, it fell noticeably short of the mark; it was clear the men preferred the love story that followed. I wondered whether they felt as I did that the film "dated" in more ways than one. It could only serve as a poignant reminder that the days of regimental horseplay and frilly colonel's daughters were over; they belonged to a peacetime past. Of the three of us, only one failed to find it depressing. Marie-Anaik's son sat spellbound, his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, eyes glued to the screen.

"It must be swell, *la vie militaire*," he said at the end.

The following day began badly. There was hubbub below stairs when we came down that morning. Hall and entry were crowded by what looked like an invasion of emigrants. Heaps of baggage blocked sidewalks and entrance, trunks, bags, bicycles, golf sticks, rugs

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and baskets. Their owners crowded about the protesting manager. He had no rooms, he could not invent them, he was full to the roof. But the excited voices kept insisting. They had to be taken in. They had to sleep somewhere. They could not stay in the street.

The manager took refuge in his inner office. "These Americans—pouring in by hundreds all night. The town is full."

I asked him had he heard the morning news. He nodded.

"Bad, very bad." He turned away with a shrug. That was all, but it said enough.

Over by the shipping office, shiny American cars lined the curb. Another long file of them stood before the Consulate—Cadillacs, Buicks, Packards. In both offices, the same impatient crowd. "But you *have* to get us out of here. What is a consul good for, anyhow?" "You've *got* to sell me passage, I tell you. I can pay—I'll pay anything." It was the scattering of leaves before the storm.

There was nothing to do but wait. We took refuge in an eddy—a café on the port, where a French woman was trying to find a way to communicate with her husband.

"He's at the arsenal. I've driven all night. I have to see him."

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“But, Madame, you can’t telephone, the telephones are cut.”

“But surely you can send someone?”

“They won’t let a civilian pass the sentry. Why don’t you try the police?”

At the table beside us, a lieutenant in a brand-new khaki uniform sat staring into space. He had the same dazed, uprooted look of the peasant soldiers on their arrival on the island. He sat so still, you had the uncanny feeling he wasn’t there. I wondered what he saw—not the street of Cherbourg, surely. His look said: yesterday and tomorrow—the present was a blank. When we left the terrace, his coffee was still untouched and he had not lighted his cigarette.

Lunch was a silent meal. In the dining room, where every seat was taken, the only sounds were the clink of forks on china and the subdued squawking of a parrot in a covered cage that stood on the floor by one of the guests. She had brought it all the way from Poland, the waiter said. They could not persuade her to leave the bird outside. Conversation at the tables went on in undertones; each time an officer pushed through the swinging doors everyone stopped eating and glanced his way, with the same fearful expectancy.

Lunch was not yet half over when a Navy lieutenant appeared in a doorway that led into the hall of the hotel. He stood for a moment looking through the

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room, then strolled casually towards our corner. At the table beside ours, where the general ate alone, he paused, and bending down spoke guardedly.

"The Germans have entered Poland. Crossed the frontier at eleven this morning. General mobilization tomorrow."

In the general's lean features not a muscle stirred.

"Ah?" he said impassively, and after a pause, with a barely perceptible tightening of the lips—"Just what Stalin wanted." Then he went on eating his *veau marengo*.

Across the table, Marie-Anaik's son turned crimson. "*Ça y est,*" he gulped, and for a moment I thought he was going to cry. But he was not Marie-Anaik's son for nothing. A full breath, a wriggle of the shoulders, and he took up his fork again. Indeed, he and the general were the only ones in our corner of the dining room to finish the meal. The general ate to the end, sipped his coffee, lit a cigarette, wiped his fingers daintily on a napkin, and bowed as he passed us on his way to the door. Only one detail marred that otherwise faultless display of military phlegm which I scarcely knew whether to admire or resent. The general forgot his raincoat!

So I did not hear the tocsin on the island after all. I heard it in a Cherbourg hotel at midnight, to the accompaniment of slamming doors, boisterous farewells

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and starting engines, as officers left to report at their mobilization centers. And with it, all the while I was conscious of an American voice in the court, shouting though the hubbub in atrocious French, like a voice in a nightmare: "I tell you, *je veux* rooms, *chambres*—*toute suite*—*pour deux peuples* and *ung chauffeur!*"

The whole day kept that nightmare quality. It was a confusion of blurred images, with here and there a detail: the silent groups about the mobilization posters; the shuffling feet of conscripts on their way to the station; a red-eyed woman in a doorway; a drunken longshoreman cursing Hitler. Afterwards, the interminable wait at the pier, with crowds massed like bees about the shut window of the steamship office; a schoolgirl perched on her luggage, shrilly proclaiming: "If they don't take me on this one, I'll not stir a step till the next ship comes"; a woman with hair like rippled gray ice and red-lacquered toe-nails in high-heeled sandals, fumbling in her bag with ringed hands that trembled, trembled. . . . Last of all, the three tan funnels of the *Empress*, indistinct in the evening fog, the loaded tender sidling away from the pier and Yves's voice saying regretfully, "It's too bad she couldn't stay and see the war."

The day ended with an electric storm that was like the end of the world. It crashed over the blacked-out city with the noise of an air bombardment—"Only this

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time it's God," remarked one of the two men who shared our compartment in the train. We had not yet seen his face, except in the lightning flashes, for we sat in total darkness, waiting for the train to pull out. But we talked back and forth in the intervals between thunderclaps. We all felt the need of talking.

He was setting out to join his regiment.

"My card says the first day of mobilization, but it didn't specify the hour. So I waited for the last train. Put it off as long as I could. So—" his voice trailed off into silence.

"I'm going home," the second man said from his corner. His voice was shrill, like a child's, but strangely toneless. It was like a voice without a body. "The captain, when he saw my card, he said, 'You go home,' he said. 'You've done your part for France,' he said. I showed him my head. I showed him my belly and my legs. 'I got that at Chemin des Dames,' I said. 'but I'm good for more.' 'Oh, no,' he said, 'you're a brave man,' he said, 'you go home.' "

"Well, you're in luck," the other man said shortly.

"Oh, no, I'm not in luck." The toneless voice thinned to a whimper. "They stole my lunch, they did."

"Stole your lunch?"

"Yes, stole it, the dirty officers, *les sacrés galonnés*. I said to the captain, I said, 'You've got too many

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officers. They're on the stairs, they're behind the door, they're under the benches, they're everywhere—”

The man in the other corner stirred uneasily.

“Well, now you're going home,” he soothed.

But the voice shrilled on.

“They bust in your head, they dig red irons in your belly, they smash your legs! They blow you up and bury you alive! I told the captain, ‘Look out for the *galonnés*,’ I said. They're worse than the Boches!” The voice sank to a plaintive whisper. “You know what they did to me. They stole my lunch!”

“Oh, Lord,” groaned the man across from me. “Why don't they give us some light?”

The train shuddered throughout its length, and after a few false starts pulled out of the station, bumping over the switches as if the wheels were cogs. He spoke again under cover of the noise.

“*Bon Dieu*, when I think I may come home like that! If it weren't for the kids, I'd never— Maybe the world will be better for the kids when it's over. Though that's what people said last time. . . . Perhaps this time things will be different. At any rate, it's all we have to go on—”

The train bumped on through the darkness. When we reached Lison the storm had ended and a full moon shone overhead. There we stopped. “Mobilization schedule—no trains for six hours,” the station-master

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told us. The station was a bivouac. Hundreds of reservists lay sleeping on the platform and on the floors of the waiting-rooms among crumpled papers and empty bottles. Every bench had an occupant. We found chairs in the bar, but the bar itself was gutted —nothing remained to drink but “alcohol,” the weary barmaid said, not a drop of beer or lemon soda. She poured us out a *menthe à l'eau* and left us. Probably she went to bed; she never returned to collect pay for the drinks.

Dawn came before our train was ready. This time we shared a compartment with two peasants, Norman farmers, who had walked ten miles to the station. Each carried a rolled blanket and food in a cotton bag. They fell to eating, cutting the bread and sausage with slow, careful gestures.

“*Mauvais dimanche,*” said one. “I’d rather be in the wheat field than here. Finished threshing at ten last night.”

“Haven’t begun mine yet. Who’s going to do it now? Have to let it rot.” He sighed. “Curse this Hitler.”

The return journey, instead of six hours, took thirty-six. At times the train was full. Bands of reservists crowded into the compartments, piling the corridor with their blankets and bundles. Few wore uniforms; many had put on their Sunday best, and

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dusted the leather seats off carefully before they sat down. They rode with us for a few stations and at the next junction crowded out again. For long stretches the train was almost empty.

What struck me forcibly was the quiet of the men. No singing, no flowers on the guns, no "On to Berlin." No enthusiasm and yet no bitterness. It had to be. When a boisterous lad, one of the only two drunken soldiers I saw during the day, jostled his way through the corridor shouting, "*Vive l'armée! Vive la France!*" it rang curiously false, like a bad piece of acting. It recalled the film we had seen in Cherbourg. The second drunken man was older. "Fifty-five and a volunteer!" he shouted, his red face streaming with sweat as he stood swaying in the doorway of the compartment. "I beat 'em at Verdun, I'll beat 'em anywhere. *Ho, les Fritz! Gare aux tripes!*" He lunged with an imaginary bayonet. "*Kaput, les Boches! Kamerad!*"

The boys beside us applauded. "Go to it, grandpa!" But there was something ironical in their applause, as if they were years older and he, the boy.

The train pushed south, through the rich pastures with the red cattle. Nothing there to show that trains like ours were draining the country of its life-blood. One station was like another—families in sober groups, each with its soldier, old women in coiffes grimacing back their tears, wives bravely waving, knuckles held

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tight against their lips. At times father and son boarded the train together.

"He's twenty years old, that boy of mine," one man said heavily, as the two of them found seats beside us. "If I'd have known this was coming, he wouldn't be here today."

One lad broke down completely (he had left his wife in the hospital, he said later) and stood sobbing at the window, while his father on the platform tried to find words to comfort him.

"Look at me, *mon gars*. I went through the last one—four years in the trenches—and I'm still here. You'll come back—you're sure to come back."

The boy gulped down his tears and dug nervously in the pockets of his coat.

"I—I've forgotten my cigarettes."

On the platform a woman's voice called shrilly—

"Quick—a cigarette. A cigarette *pour le militaire!*"

I had to look away then, myself. "A cigarette for the soldier"—it was too much like the "*cigarette du condamné*."

Through it all, Marie-Anaik's son sat in his corner, cheeks flushed, lips tight together, and hands thrust deep in his pockets. He had never imagined this aspect of war. But technically, we were not yet at war.

Somewhere out of the past a phrase leaped: "Mobilization is not war." Poincaré had said that in 1914. I

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tried it on Yves: He opened his eyes wide at that.  
“Since when?”

In the street of a gray Brittany town where we changed trains, we learned that since five o’clock, the third of September, France was officially at war. A radio, speaking through an open window announced it; the groups that paused to listen made no comment beyond a muttered, “It had to come . . .” and drifted away.

Another night in a railroad station, crowded this time with civilians, refugees from the evacuated regions in east and north, wearily exchanging stories.

“They gave me two hours to leave—” “We slept three nights on the straw—” “Two whole days coming from Paris—” “All I have in the world is here—” Young children wailed dismally or slept in blanketed bundles on the baggage counter. Older ones chattered, “We’ll play all the time. There won’t be any school.”

We reached the island in the early morning. It was like sighting land after a shipwreck. Never had it seemed so peaceful, so secure and out of the world. Here was something war could not shatter. There shot into my mind a picture of the battlefields of the last war as I saw them afterwards—trenches filling with green, tangles of rusted wire among the growing thickets. Man can destroy permanently only himself

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and the work of his hands. There was comfort in the thought.

On the village square we met Madame la Colonelle. She fulminated: "That imbecile of a mayor—he's let the baker be mobilized. Now we won't have any bread!"

The path along the bay, the long climb up the hill to the Semaphore—there stood the House in the morning sun, with roses waving at the open windows and the sea at its back. A group of figures in horizon blue stood about the gate. One of them came toward us. It was the Sergeant.

"Well, here you are at last," he called cheerily. "Welcome home."

The soldiers, too, came crowding forward—even the sentinel crossed the grass to offer me his hand. I was touched by the heartiness of their welcome. Yet I thought it strange they asked no questions about the main object of our trip.

"My sister's ship sailed just in time. Wasn't it lucky?"

"Lucky, hm, yes—" the Sergeant hesitated. There was a moment of awkward silence. Then I saw Amélie bearing down on us like a hearse with funeral plumes.

"Poor Madame," she wailed. "How terrible for you—your poor sister—drowned . . ."

As in a sunstroke, the landscape lost its color and

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blurred out. Behind the haze, against a background of voices cursing the Boches, I was conscious of the Sergeant's steady tones: "English ship . . . torpedoed . . . Canadians and Americans on board. . . . We can't be sure . . ." and Amélie protesting, "Of course it's sure. I heard it myself." Then Marie-Anaik's arms were around me and her voice reassured and scolded.

"Don't you believe them! They don't know what they heard. Amélie, if that tongue of yours doesn't choke you someday. . . . There, there, don't you listen, *ma fille, ma chère fille, mon petit*. . . . I heard the radio myself. It's a ship with a foreign name, but I swear to you, it's not the *Empress!*"

She carried me off to the kitchen, fed me coffee and stinging sips of Calvados from a bottle the Sergeant had brought her, of his own distilling. She fetched in the dog for comfort and told how the soldiers were spoiling her and how Alain was making their life a burden with his fussiness over the house. And had I seen my garden? The men had worked there all day putting it in shape, as a surprise. They had thrashed the beans for seed and braided the onions and the Corporal had promised to set out a row of little apple trees, that he would bring from his own nursery, after the cold set in.

Dear Marie-Anaik—all the while she talked, something inside me kept drumming: torpedoed, torpedoed,

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torpedoed. . . . It was incredible I had overlooked that danger. I had been hypnotized by the war on land. Exclusively on land.

At noon, after what seemed hours, we had the radio news. Marie-Anaik was right. The torpedoed ship was not the *Empress*, it was the *Athenia*. Yet as Marie-Anaik said, "It doesn't seem right to be glad. There were other folks' sisters on that ship. Still, that's the way we're made, I guess. We can't help putting our own first."

For all the news Marie-Anaik had given me, she left out the most important item. She had agreed to do the cooking for the soldiers.

"The Lieutenant came the day you left and we talked it over. It may be weeks before they get what they need to cook with. And besides, what do men know about cooking? They all have wives at home. So I told the Lieutenant I'd be glad to do it, since I have the time—"

"You have time?"

"Of course I have time! I won't go into the fields as much. I'll sit at home like a lady." She laughed gaily. "Cooking isn't work."

"But seventeen men—"

"Seventeen or one, meals have to be got. I cooked for five as it was. And then"—her eyes grew serious—"at least I'll be doing something useful. I can't fight,

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but I can cook, and cooking is as good as anything else, I guess, to keep you from thinking—”

That night in the farm kitchen, we heard another piece of news. Seventeen-year-old Yves was the hero. He had gone back to the mainland that afternoon to enlist in the marines. His mother's face was sober as she sat at the end of the long table, for Yves, as I knew, stood closest to her heart of all her children. (“He's her baby, her *enfant Jésus*,” Anne-Elise says pettishly.) Yet Marie-Anaik had not opposed his going. Yves would not have been called up for another year, but “since he had his heart set on enlisting, I haven't the right to stop him. I guess that's the way it had to be.”

Alain Lebras, very proud of his son's gesture, could not resist stealing a share of the glory.

“We're all like that,” he bragged. “All of us ready to die for France.”

His wife's knitting needles stopped their steady clicking, but only a second or two. Then came the dry rejoinder.

“They'll not be asking you to die for France at your age, Alain Lebras. But if you get that field by Pors-a-pren plowed under before frost, there will be more potatoes for France next spring.”

It was then I remembered to ask Marie-Anaik if she had heard the tocsin.

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"Oh, yes, we all heard it," she said, laying down her knitting. But she had missed seeing the mobilization flags hoisted on the Semaphore staff. She didn't even step out to look, she said. She hadn't time. She was too busy in the kitchen making coffee for the soldiers.

## 7. Horizon Blue

How many beds can you spare for refugees, Madame?"

The Colonel's granddaughter, a thick braid on either shoulder, a pencil poised in her fingers, stood in the path, smiling shyly from beneath her blond bang.

"Thank you, Madame, that makes three hundred so far."

Marie-Anaik smiled.

"It's satisfying to see all this planning beforehand. Generally we wait till the last minute."

The little girl checked her list with twelve-year-old gravity and turned to me.

"Grandmother says to tell you she'll be careful not to send you any but the nice ones."

Marie-Anaik's lips tightened.

"Going to weed them out, is she? Tell Grandmother she needn't take the trouble for me. I'm not particular. Madame here can have the sheep; I'll be content

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with the goats. They need a roof too, *mon enfant.*"

The child nodded doubtfully.

"I suppose so; but Grandmother says—"

"Well, I'd like to tell Grandmother—" Marie-Anaik broke off, frowning. "No use tormenting the child; she's not responsible," she said when the little girl had gone. "But it doesn't seem very Christian to me, all this picking and choosing. When you've lost your home, you've lost your home."

So far, no refugees had come to the island, except "voluntary" ones, who returned with their children to the villas they owned or rented, or took rooms at the hotels. Near-by towns on the mainland had already received their quota from evacuated districts in the east, but rumor said few would be sent to us, except as an emergency measure, because of our limited water supply (cisterns and wells), and the difficulties of getting supplies to the island from the mainland.

As it was, mobilization had drafted one of the two butchers and our only baker. It took the "imbecile Mayor," to quote Madame la Colonelle, nearly a week to repair his blunder, and in the meantime, the island went without bread. Not the whole island, however. The "blue neighbors" at Post Number Three kept our district supplied from their own rations. Sergeant Gonidec detailed two men daily to bring bread from the mainland. Even Amélie then admitted there were

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certain advantages in having soldiers "all over the place."

Nineteen men at the Semaphore, seventeen in Alain's house—the north shore had never known so large a population of males. Anne-Elise said it was a pity there were not a few young and good-looking ones among them—a dig at Jean Blanc, the Parisian, who had shown a marked preference for Marie-Anaik's pert daughter from the first. She was the first Brittany girl he had seen, he said, who did not look as if she were built to draw a cart!

Alice Bozec, who objects to men as individuals, acknowledged grudgingly that "in quantities" they had their uses. That was after the soldiers had dug her entire crop of fall potatoes in an afternoon.

When the soldiers first came, they were eager to work. Anything, they said, was better than sitting idle. Once they had installed their living quarters, there remained literally nothing to occupy them, beyond a few hours' guard duty each day. It surprised me the men were given no drill, no military exercise of any kind. When I asked the Sergeant about it, he shrugged.

"No orders. Barracks are full. The staff had to find them quarters so it sent them here."

"But if someday they are called on to fight—"

"Chances are they'll never have to, unless they're

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needed to fill a gap. Then they'll be given training—somewhere."

Then why were they not left at home until needed, I asked. What was the point of taking men from their work just at harvest time and upsetting the whole economy of the region?

Gonidec's only answer was another shrug.

"*Que voulez-vous*, that's how it is."

The Lieutenant, too, when he came, said much the same thing. The men were "occupying the place"; their presence had an excellent effect on the morale of the civil population. As for the rest—

"You must not forget, Madame, we have the Line. The battlefield is there. We are not going to fight the war in Brittany."

He was a dry little man, middle-aged, with an aristocratic stoop, an absent-minded manner, eye-glasses and fine nervous hands always busy with the long ends of his mustache. He encouraged us to make use of the soldiers wherever possible. "Their military duties won't keep them busy," he said, "and there's nothing worse than boredom."

The men at first asked nothing better. Work would keep them from thinking. They all had their worries. Sergeant Gonidec worried about his cattle (he was a cattle-merchant). He and his helper had been mobilized the same day. His wife was a capable woman, but

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still—Corporal Blanc said his trees would grow without him, but there were saplings to be sheltered from frost, and fruit trees to be dug up and delivered at planting time. That was no work for a woman.

The men told similar stories: potatoes and beets still in the ground, threshing half over, cattle to tend . . .

“When I was at home, I worked from sunrise to dark at this season, and I’m a strong man. What can my wife hope to do, with a six-month-old baby and only the children to help her? Twelve cows and four horses—” That was Hervé, a peasant from across the Narrows.

Little Cornec, who owned a small inland farm, said his wife was an invalid. “She worked too hard while we were paying off the mortgage. She’s been in bed now for over a year. I hired a fourteen-year-old girl to take care of her before I left. But she can’t look after the farm, or tend the stock—”

“And here I am,” he would add with a helpless gesture of his big hands, “sitting here like a *rentier*, earning fifteen francs a month and paying out two hundred to that girl. Everything I’ve worked for going to ruin. I wish they’d send me to the front.”

For the first few weeks, the men worked industriously. Except for the sentries, they were constantly in the neighbors’ fields, digging the beet and potato crop, plowing, cleaning out weeds and burning grass. They

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hung about Marie-Anaik's stable at milking time in the hope of being asked to lend a hand. Gonidec sat up two whole nights with Black Nose, the black and white heifer, and almost came to blows with little Cornec over who should deliver the calf.

Soldiers kept dropping into my garden, begging for odd jobs, to Alain Lebras' annoyance, for this was his domain and he resented competition. He need not have worried. The men's eagerness for work belonged to a phase of transition; their zeal soon lost its edge. True, there was only a limited number of jobs for them to do on the small island farms, but they rapidly lost taste even for these. It was galling, they said, to putter over somebody's garden patch when you had acres rotting at home. They claimed, too, that "certain people" (I suspected Amélie) exploited them. A man deserves decent pay for a day's work, they said, even if he wears a uniform! But the real cause of their flagging energy lay deeper. Man being what he is, the most adaptable of animals, it took these active hard-working peasants only a few weeks to accustom themselves to a life of idleness.

Soon they no longer begged for jobs. Their chief object was to escape any and all things requiring an effort. Gonidec and the Corporal had trouble obtaining even rudimentary cleanliness in their quarters, except on days when the Lieutenant came. If the officers re-

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laxed their watchfulness, or were called away to the mainland, the rooms the men occupied remained unswept. They rebelled at dishwashing and helping Marie-Anaik peel vegetables. "Let Firmin do it. That's all he's good for," they said. Firmin, a farm laborer from inland Brittany, was too dull-witted to object. If the Sergeant had not intervened, he would have done kitchen duty for the entire group. Sentry duty could not be shirked; but like everything else, it became a subject of complaint. The sun was too hot and the night wind too cold and what was the use of it anyhow—guarding a lot of rocks? The sailors at the Semaphore kept watch; they would give the alarm if anything approached by sea.

Sergeant Gonidec turned a deaf ear to the grumbling until the afternoon he found a sentinel asleep in the heather behind the lighthouse. I heard the hubbub from the garden. Though Gonidec spoke Breton, what he said was understandable in any language. The culprit made up for his nap with eight hours' unbroken guard duty. It also cost him his next leave. And that was nothing, as Gonidec pointed out. At the front it would have meant a firing squad. "Twelve bullets in your hide; and well deserved, too, with your country at war!"

Stiff at attention, the victim—it was Firmin—blinked his sleep-swollen lids.

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"B-but, Sergeant, we're not at the front, and—and I'd forgotten there was a war!"

At this the men, who stood uneasily on the outskirts during the dressing-down, broke into hoots of laughter; though I imagine more than one of them might have echoed that amazing statement.

It was surprising how little the soldiers talked of war, now that the dreaded thing had come. They expressed satisfaction at the news French troops had penetrated—a little—into Germany, to "give the Boches a taste of their own medicine." The disaster of Poland evoked little comment beyond, "well, there wasn't much use of going to war, if we had to let that happen." After that, their interest flagged. The war was far away from Brittany; it came home to them only through their own troubles.

Late one evening I found Hervé in Marie-Anaik's kitchen. I liked Hervé, a shy man who had a knack with animals and a boyish, friendly manner that endeared him to children. Tall and sturdily built, he had probably been handsome in his youth, before a kick from a horse "dismasted" his face, as Alain said. That night he had just come off sentry duty—his gun leaned against the wall and his helmet lay on the table like a black bowl. He sat chin on his breast, his hands dangling loosely between his knees. Marie-Anaik had put

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down her knitting and was studying him over her spectacles, her forehead puckered in a frown.

"No, no more cider," she reasoned. "Troubles float on top like driftwood; you can't wash them under."

Hervé lifted his head.

"Gonidec could give me someone's turn if he wanted to," he said glumly. "There's that Parisian—he's got no family here, and no place to go—"

Marie-Anaik gave an impatient *t-t-k!*

"That's what you've been telling me for the last hour. And I say again: the Sergeant can't give you leave until your turn comes. That wouldn't be fair to the others. It's his wife," she explained, looking up at me. "She can't come tomorrow. The baby's sick, and Hervé won't have his free day until next week."

"But Gonidec doesn't understand," Hervé insisted. "Maybe he can't get along with his own wife and he's glad to get away. A lot of men are like that. But my wife and I are different—we get along so well. I've never been away before." He gulped and a tear slopped down his scarred cheek. Then he fumbled in the inner pocket of his coat (how I recognized that gesture!) and drew out a wallet with photographs.

"There she is, and that's my boy. I took him to the gate on my bicycle when I left. He wouldn't let me go. He said, 'I want to go with Papa to the war.' "

I felt an uncomfortable feeling in my own throat

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and I resented Marie-Anaik's dry, "Well, that's getting you nowhere, *mon gars*." I thought her definitely heartless when she hustled the soldier from the kitchen with the cheerful advice to "get out in the air and think of something else."

"Yes, I'm sorry for Hervé," she said, "and I'd be sorrier yet if there hadn't been so much cider in those tears." But her eyes were serious. "This can't go on—it's bad for the army." She spoke as earnestly as if the weight of a division rested on her shoulders. "I have an idea. I'm going to talk it over with the Lieutenant."

Until then the soldiers had taken their meals in their own quarters. One of the men—generally Firmin—was detailed to carry the cooking-pots from the farm kitchen to the house across the lane. Marie-Anaik's "idea" had to do with another arrangement.

When I called for my milk the following evening, I found the kitchen so crowded I had to edge in along the wall. It presented an idyllic picture. In one corner, the Parisian was wiping dishes for Anne-Elise; in another, Hervé helped 'Guitte, Auguste's wife, get her two boys to bed; Gonidec, the Corporal and Alain Lebras sat smoking by the radio; and two card games grouped the other men about the table, with Firmin at one end painfully writing a letter and Marie-Anaik at the other, serene with her knitting.

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"I don't see how you stand it—all that noise and smoke. It would drive me crazy," Amélie told her.

Marie-Anaik shook her head at Amélie's obtuseness.

"I don't mind people. I always liked big families," she said contentedly.

From that day on, the morale of Post Number Three showed marked improvement. Sergeant Gonidec gave Marie-Anaik entire credit for the change; she deserved a decoration, he said. The Corporal thought the weekly visits of wives from the mainland were partly responsible. (Every Sunday a bevy of coiffes fluttered about the Post like butterflies.) The Lieutenant tugged his mustache and remarked philosophically that given time, men adapt themselves to anything. I dare say all three were right.

Even Hervé brightened noticeably. From time to time I still found him scanning the coast across the Narrows through the Sergeant's binoculars. "That's my roof," he would point out, "and the blue patch behind it is the barn. When my wife washes, I can see the sheets spread out on the heather." But his tone sounded less wistful: he seemed to find real comfort in the sight.

Of all the soldiers, only one stayed persistently gloomy. His home was near Chartres, too far for his wife to come to the island for a day's visit. But that

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was not all. Though born in Brittany, he had always lived on a Beauce wheat farm and spoke no Breton. It made him feel lonesome, he said, never hearing a word he could understand. He kept pestering the Sergeant to have him sent away, "someplace where people talk my language. I'm sick of being a foreigner."

The Parisian, though he too spoke no Breton, showed little patience with his comrade.

"Why don't you make 'em talk French to you? I do. If there are any foreigners here, it's them, not us. This is France."

His own period of depression had lasted only a few days. I think his recovery dated definitely from the morning I lent him fishing rod and tackle, and he discovered that the sea contains bigger fish than the *goujons* and minnows he fished for Sundays in the Seine. His first big *vieille* was an event. "Three and three-quarter pounds and I didn't keep my thumb on the scales either. In Paris you'd pay twenty francs for anything that size. Maybe when peace comes, I'll settle down here and fish for a living." This with a sly glance at Anne-Elise. From then on, he spent all his free time on the rocks. During the days when the other men worked in the fields, he never joined them. He was an upholsterer by trade; he had never seen a potato outside a basket before, he said. He didn't believe in going outside his specialty.

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"Let the hicks grub in the dirt if they want to. It's their life. But if you have something for me to do in my own line—"

I got him to make a new cover for the Captain's chair. He did a beautiful job and even persuaded Amélie, by promising her fish, to stitch the seams. While he fitted and basted, seated on the living-room floor, he tackled me on the subject of politics.

"You can't discuss such things with these peasants—all they care about is cows."

He admitted to being a Socialist. "That's as far Left as you dare go when you wear this," he said, slapping the leg of his horizon-blue breeches. He was curious to learn what I thought about Russia.

"What do *you* think?" I asked.

"It's a queer business," he said thoughtfully. "Doesn't tie up with anything we've met with before. I know it looks bad on the face of things, but when the *Matin* and the *Jour* tell us the Russians have sold us out, I don't feel like believing them today any more than I did yesterday. God, I wish I knew what A—and T—think about it all (he named two prominent French communists). And that's the worst of it," he broke out, "thanks to the war, the capitalists have the working class clamped down today where it can't say *ouf!* You have to fall back on yourself and work out your own line and maybe it isn't the correct one."

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. . . They're using this Russian business as a club to put us down, just the way they put us down in the last war. That's what makes me think there must be something phoney in their arguments. Say, do you ever get Moscow on that thing?" He pointed to the radio.

"Yes, but the broadcasts don't tell you anything. They merely give the communiqués."

"Why in hell don't they speak straight out? Don't you suppose they know what we're up against?"

He jabbed his needle so savagely into a thick fold that it snapped.

"*Merde!*" he sputtered and sucked his forefinger. A moment's silence, while he threaded another, then—

"They still play the *Internationale*, don't they?"

"Yes, they still play the *Internationale*."

I had reasons of my own for increased cheerfulness as the autumn wore on. After a period of silence that lasted a month or more, I began receiving news again from the Captain. I had no inkling of his whereabouts—he was "somewhere on the sea"—but cables came from unnamed ports and now and then a letter.

When Marie-Télégramme brought the cables from the post office she always took care to call to me from the gate, "Good news from the Captain!" Telegrams are dreaded things in war-time, and as the *mairie*

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stamped its visa on them all before delivery, she knew what they contained.

The fact that mail came through was only one of many indications that life was growing normal again in spite of the war. Trains ran, supplies reached us regularly; occasional shortages of coffee, sugar, oil or wine, due to faulty organization, were soon remedied. We scarcely noticed the meat restrictions—two meatless days a week. Few people ate meat daily in peacetime, fish being plentiful and far cheaper. There was no lack of fuel.

The war that seemed so close to us in August and September had moved away once more. After the initial explosion, it had shrunk to fire-cracker skirmishes in the east, along the impregnable Line. Except for the presence of the soldiers, there was little on the island that recalled it. We blacked out our windows conscientiously—a little less conscientiously as time went on. Marie-Anaik draped a black apron over her kitchen window and let it go at that. But we saw no planes, except for an occasional French one on scout duty between Cherbourg and Brest. We had prepared for refugees, but no refugees came. Madame la Colonelle, in a spotless white nurse's uniform with a red cross on the headband, presided mornings over the dispensary she had started in the village, but found little

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to dispense beyond remedies for local toothaches and indigestions. There were no "interesting cases."

The radio did its best to enliven the daily communiqués, with visits to munition factories, warships and casemates of the Line; and interviews with gunners, airmen and generals; but it gave no news beyond the day's skirmishes and patrols. The press printed stirring editorials and little else—two wretched sheets, spattered with blanks where "Anastasie's" shears had massacred the copy. A "*drôle de guerre,*" everyone agreed. "I'll bet the men on the Line are every bit as fed up as we are," Gonidec declared. The Lieutenant pulled his mustache and predicted big events by spring. "This is the initial phase; we're marking time and trying out material. Then, too, Hitler needs to rest his troops after the Polish campaign." "Well, we'd better not let him rest too long," was Gonidec's comment.

The Lieutenant ceased complaining of lonely evenings. His wife and daughter had come from the south of France to keep him company. 'Guite Lebras took her boys to Brest to spend a month with Auguste while his ship was undergoing repairs. Women friends wrote from Paris they were moving up to the Line for the winter, to be near their husbands. I began wondering whether I, too, might not be able to join the Captain at one of the war ports when his ship put in. Certainly, a "*drôle—très drôle—de guerre.*"

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Then, without warning, war surged close to us again. One night in late autumn a southwest gale struck the island. It began at sunset and blew all night, with seas bursting on the rocks and the whole north shore smoking with spindrift. The air stung with salt spray; clots of sea-foam drove across the moor, clinging like suds to the heather.

On such nights, even a house with granite walls seems fragile as a tent. You hear the wind wrench at the roof, floors vibrate like membranes, wooden beams creak and crack with the noise of rigging in a gale. Listening to the wind that night, like every sailor's wife, I thought of ships. "You can't help it, when you have men at sea," Marie-Anaik used to say, "even though nowadays ships are no more scared of storms than we are." The war had given new body to that old instinctive fear. To quote Marie-Anaik again, when men found they could weather storms, "they had to think up something worse."

When morning came, the wind still held. From the window, I saw Alain Lebras heading for the sea with an ax, an iron bar and a coil of rope in his barrow. He waved to me and shouted, "Tide bringing in . . ." The wind drowned the rest.

When I reached the sea wall, many of the neighbors were there before me. Drenched with spray, they stood in huddled groups—soldiers, men from the Sema-

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phore, a group of women in black bonnets, their skirts whipping in the wind. Below the wall, the waves of the receding tide crashed and foamed among the rocks. At its outer lip had grown a monstrous hedge, a waist-deep roll of brown seaweed, bristling with black timbers. A scum of wood fragments rose and fell with the breakers; each new wave brought more. Out beyond the surf, dark things bobbed on the water, rose on the crest of a wave, sank out of sight in the hollow, reappeared.

Up to their thighs in water, Alain Lebras and Séverin worked with gaff and rope, seizing and securing timbers that came within reach, dragging them in shore, dodging others that crashed forward, borne on an incoming wave.

"What ship do you suppose she was, Sergeant?" one of the soldiers asked.

Gonidec, who stood beside me, shrugged and shook his head.

"Looks like several ships to me. Though I suppose this stuff was her cargo. Mine-props, I'd say. Hope she was a Boche. For God's sake, Lebras, look out!"

He swung himself down the rocks as a black something, wide as a door and longer, bore down on Alain. The latter leaped aside; it missed him by a few inches. With the Sergeant's help, he dragged the new prize beyond reach of the waves. It was the side of a life-

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boat, festooned with ropes, brave with white paint, but splintered and black at the edges.

"Gutted," the Sergeant said, as he climbed up the rocks again. "Look at my hands—all charcoal." He wiped them on the grass. "Guess she hit a mine—blew up and burnt. All the stuff is charred. It won't be good for anything now but fire-wood."

Somehow, I could not picture myself using that wood for fires. It would be like burning coffins, I said to Gonidec.

"Wait till you know what it is to be cold."

There was a shout from Séverin who with his gaff had fished up something round from a mass of seaweed. He disengaged the hook, splashed to shore and clambered up the rocks to lay his find at our feet.

No one spoke. We stood in a circle, looking at the drowned thing on the grass. It was a sailor's beret, with the red pompon like a wilted flower.

## 8. Wanted—a Battlefield

THROUGHOUT the winter, the war to us was concentrated on the sea. Two mines washed ashore on a beach across the Narrows. A lobster fisher from Morlaix who anchored for a night in the inlet, said he counted eleven on his way down the coast. None came to us. The Sergeant said we would know it if they did.

"You'd need new windows, Madame, if ever one of the things crashed on our rocks."

When winds and currents were "right," to quote Alain, the tide brought in more wreckage. He always knew when it was due to come. Séverin, too. On such days you would see them armed with gaff and rope, moving cautiously over the smugglers' path at high tide like rival hunters. The pile of driftwood in the farm courtyard reached above the eaves. A gruesome thing to look at, Marie-Anaik said. It gave her the creeps to step out of her own door after dark. She longed to make a bonfire of it all; only the thatch and the near-by straw stack kept her from doing it.

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Alain made light of such squeamishness. Wood was wood to him, whatever its origin; he would find a use for it on the farm. As proof of what he said, he built a rabbit hutch, with elegant maple doors from the locker of some ship's cabin. . . . One day I found him grieving over a seaman's boot he had found wedged among the rocks—because it was such a fine boot and he hadn't found the mate! He carried it home and put it carefully away, hoping for a miracle. I recalled then that only a century or so before, men of Alain's blood tied lanterns to the horns of their cattle and turned them loose on the moor, to lure ships on the rocks.

In peacetime, the island saw few ships. Now many passed within sight of land: convoys, like a row of black dashes on the horizon, and solitary travelers, hugging the shore, signaled from semaphore to semaphore as they journeyed along the coast.

More ships, more wreckage—and with them our first crop of rumors. They started with a report that U-boats had been sighted in our neighborhood. The chief at the Semaphore told the light-keeper, and the light-keeper's wife passed on the news to Amélie. The light-keeper said he had been expecting something of the sort. He was sure he had heard the motor of a submarine the night before, off Pors-a-pren. He ought to recognize the sound, he said; he had served in sub-

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marines himself during the last war. Amélie claimed she heard the motor too; it droned like a harvester and kept her awake for hours.

One afternoon, two French planes flew over the north shore. They hung about our sky for nearly an hour, dipping and crossing, circling above the water like gulls. After they disappeared over the horizon, we heard two muffled explosions. "Depth charges," the Sergeant said. They brought Amélie popping from her doorway like a rabbit. From then on, she heard submarines every night.

"And if they come in here, there's a reason." She wagged an accusing forefinger. "They have friends right on this island."

With that, the spy scare began in earnest. Everyone was seeing suspicious lights—winking flashes, flares—"a green one, bright as day" (that was Amélie again). Gonidec himself saw three big rockets on the mainland at two one morning when he went out to inspect the sentries. He reported them as a matter of course, though he told me privately he felt sure the rockets were "regular."

"No spy is going to set off fireworks like that," he said.

Every day brought a new story. Hervé came back from leave on the mainland with the tale that one of his neighbors had seen men carrying mysterious bun-

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dles down to the sea after dark. The police at Lannion had caught a German agent dressed as a woman. Three officers in Brest had been shot for selling plans of the city! Few nights passed without some zealous neighbor routing out the soldiers next door to trace down a light—because someone forgot to black out a window or went exploring in his upper story with a pocket lamp.

Pauline Legall was the worst. She gave Post Number Three no peace after the night she took a lantern into her court to locate a squawking hen and a soldier stepped out of the bushes by the hen-house and asked what she was doing. Pauline never got over the shock; from then on, she saw spies and lights in every corner. She would turn up at the Post at all hours, breathless and haggard, her hair streaming about her face.

“Come quick! I’ve seen them! They’re landing at Beg-ar-loj!” And she would lead the men on a wild and fruitless chase over the moor and among the rocks. After a few such expeditions the soldiers protested violently at being robbed of their sleep by the “old idiot,” as they called her. Finally Gonidec himself lost patience—he was nursing an aching tooth at the time—and ordered Pauline home with the threat to lock her up if she didn’t stay there.

All this was enough to set Pauline definitely off her balance. She complained to the Lieutenant, she threat-

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ened to write the Colonel. She actually did pen a letter to the President of the Republic, which she brought me with the plea that I take it up to Paris and deliver it. She would pay for my journey, she said; she did not trust the mails.

It was a beautifully written letter, in which Pauline specified that So-and-So and So-and-So were traitors (she gave a list of names). That they had set up "instruments" in their houses to communicate with the enemy—which they did daily, as she could testify. That she had reported these things repeatedly to the military authorities, without effect. That the latter were notoriously negligent—in particular the Lieutenant. That she was a respectable sailor's widow and a devoted patriot. . . . It went on in the same strain for eight closely written pages.

I never knew what happened to the letter. Perhaps Pauline forgot it, once she had set down her grievances on paper. But the Lieutenant looked distinctly annoyed when I told him of it, and gave his mustache a particularly vengeful pulling.

"A letter like that could make trouble," he said, frowning. "There is always some imbecile in an office to take such things seriously. You have no idea, Madame, how much secret accusation goes on in times like these. You have a population of five hundred on this island. In a few months, I dare say two hundred and

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fifty out of the five hundred will have filed papers somewhere, accusing the others. And that's a conservative estimate," he sighed.

"Has anyone denounced our neighbor on the point?"

The Lieutenant threw me a sharp glance.

"You know something about that?"

"Only the rumors you must have heard yourself."

The Lieutenant sighed again.

"It's like hitting a feather pillow," he muttered, commenting on an unspoken thought. "When I send in a report, what reply do they give me? 'This is not your field. Leave such matters to the counter-espionage.' In other words, mind your own business. But—" after a pause—"just the same, they confiscated his speed-boats!"

One evening in late November, Marie-Anaik sat with me by the fire. Her visits across the lane had grown rarer since the soldiers came; she had become a "home-body," she said. But that night she had something on her mind. "There's no room to think at home. I have to go outside."

What bothered her was a letter received that day from Yves. For two months he had been training with the marines at Lorient.

"You can't keep that boy on land even for two

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months. Do you know what he wants to do now? Go up in the air."

"Pilot a plane?"

Marie-Anaik shook her head.

"He hasn't the education. He says he's planning to be a bomber." She drew a long sigh.

"But isn't he terribly young—"

"It isn't that. . . . Maybe I'm old-fashioned—I'm not used to these new ways of war. I hate to think of my boy up there dropping bombs on people like ourselves. Oh, I know it has to be done," she added quickly, "and I'm not going to interfere. But I can't help wishing he'd stay out of the sky—" She broke off with one of her little laughs that are like a steersman's spin of the wheel, as she swings her bark resolutely to its course. "Here I am, as scared of the air as some people are of the sea. All upset at the idea of Yves getting his feet off the ground. And me a sailor's daughter—I ought to know better."

The fire crackled on the hearth, with now and then a sharp hiss as the wind drove a gust of rain down the chimney. On the table, a radio voice from London finished hanging out its washing on the Siegfried Line and started the latest war version of the old rain-sunshine-smiles theme. The B.B.C. was back to normal again; its programs, except for the general war flavor, were very like those of pre-war days. I liked the opti-

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mistic understatement of its broadcasts; they seemed better adapted to the lull we were living than the French ones, which still oscillated between heavy oratory and nervous attempts at lightness, though they had dammed the floods of Chopin (to Cortot's mournful vocal accompaniment) they gave off during the first weeks of the war.

Marie-Anaik, too, liked to listen to the British voices: they sang so nicely, she said, almost as well as Bretons. She had just made that remark apropos of "Somewhere in France—with me" that a tenor was crooning, when we heard the shot.

It cracked like an angry whip somewhere outside. A second shot followed, then a third. Heavy sabots thudded through the lane. A voice shouted, "Keep out of the road; they're coming!" I recognized Gonidec's sharp, "Shut off that flash, you fool!"

Marie-Anaik was already at the door. I caught her arm, but she pushed me aside, with a "Nonsense, it's Pauline again," and trotted out firmly towards the gate.

Whatever it was, it was certainly not the Germans. Lights flashed here and there on the Semaphore hill. Voices chattered excitedly on the hillock and neighbors called from their doors, "What is it? Is anyone hurt?"

When questioned, the sentries declared they had fired in the air to rouse the Post, but only after they

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heard the first shot. They thought it came from the direction of the Semaphore. The Semaphore chief, who arrived on the scene with four sturdy bluejackets at his back, said irately the shot was fired from the road near where the sentries stood. He heard the ball whizz past his head, very close. It must have been aimed at him. Gonidec wanted to know what he meant by that? For several minutes Army and Navy indulged in a bout of Homeric invective, while the listeners chuckled in the dark. Then the chief and his quartet of sailors withdrew to the Semaphore and Gonidec detailed scouting parties to scour the moor for suspicious characters. They hunted all night, without meeting a soul, until high tide at four o'clock in the morning, when one group fell afoul of Séverin who was cat-footing along the smugglers' path in the hope of stealing a march on Alain. They marched him back to the post, partly as a joke, partly as proof of their vigilance. But Séverin had little taste for the pleasantries. It cost him "his" tide; Alain got there before him, and it was a good morning for wood.

The mystery of the shot in the night was never cleared up. Indeed, for some strange reason, the chief at the Semaphore seemed as eager to inter the matter as Gonidec was to ferret it out. Alain Lebras insisted the "Gangulars" were back of it; Anne-Elise said she wouldn't put it beyond the Parisian (he was on sentry

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duty at the time) to waste a cartridge just for the sake of stirring up excitement. Pauline Legall, who had calmed down for the past few days, began seeing lights again. But Amélie cackled behind her hand and hinted at certain pages of the Semaphore chief's past—and present—that might . . . hmm . . . "Well, if I was somebody's husband, I might have been tempted myself." Marie-Anaik remarked with a sigh that for once Amélie was probably right.

"That's what carrying a gun does to a man," she said. "At any other time, he'd use his fists."

"You can't use your fists on a superior," the Corporal objected. "And sometimes there's a limit to what flesh and blood will stand. I knew an adjutant in the last war who—well, I'm not so sure it was a German bullet that got him when he went over the top. Anyhow, the company didn't wear crepe for him afterward."

That bit of melodrama on the Semaphore hill, if melodrama it was, had no sequel. After the night's excitement, the north shore settled down to quiet again. But our almost peacetime calm was often shattered by news of mine-sinkings in the Channel, and once the Semaphore's cannon boomed and we saw the black flag run up the signal staff. A ship in danger. However, it was only a sand-barge with engine trouble off Roc-ker-varech. Before the sailors had time to man the

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life-boat, she rigged up a storm-sheet and got safely into port.

No spectacular news came from the distant front. The papers reported that the Siegfried Line was jerry-built and only half completed, that all its outworks had been flooded by winter rains. ("Then why don't we do something about it?" Gonidec fretted.) Marie-Télégramme received word that the elder of her sons had been decorated for exceptional bravery on patrol duty and was in a hospital in Tours, recovering from pneumonia. As she had not heard from the younger boy for weeks, she begged me to write his regiment for news. Within ten days, somewhat to my surprise, I received an answer. It bore the Colonel's signature and ran as follows:

"Dear Madame: I have the honor to inform you that artilleryman Borel, Marcel is in excellent health. His negligence in the matter of letter-writing will not occur again. His mother may expect a weekly letter. I have given the necessary instructions to his superiors. Kindly accept, etc . . ."

With it came a dutiful page from the repentant Marcel, to which was added a penciled postscript: "Don't write the Colonel again, Maman; when you have anything to say, write *me*."

"I guess they don't have much to do in that sector," was Gonidec's comment.

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To the island, the invasion of Finland was an event that varied the monotony of the communiqués, nothing more. Finland lay too far away. Besides, she belonged to the neutral states who "weren't smart enough to know who their friends were." She was no ally, while Russia had not developed into an active enemy, in spite of the Colonel's fulminating. The Colonel now declared that Britain and France ought to send Finland some of their idle troops to "give those Bolsheviks a drubbing they'd remember." The memory of what he called the "insult to the Army" rankled more than the Russo-German pact itself. This Finnish business, he said, was a heaven-sent opportunity to wipe it out in blood.

Few people, if any, shared his opinion. Séverin, who had been there, said Finland was colder than the Cape. He wouldn't go back himself if he could help it, so he didn't see why French soldiers should be sent north to freeze. Then, too, we had not kept the Germans from swallowing Poland. What made us think we would have better luck protecting the Finns? Gonidec agreed. Moreover, this wasn't our war. Our war was with Hitler. He could not see we advanced our chances by fighting Russians in Finland. Marie-Anaik thought it showed war was a disease. "It's catching as measles," she said.

The Finnish war remained a topic of conversation

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for twenty-four hours, after which it was overshadowed by a purely local event. We received the visit of a General. He came unheralded; so unexpectedly, in fact, that the Corporal, who happened to be at the port when the General's launch put in, had to borrow a bicycle and pedal back at top speed to warn the Sergeant. I heard sounds of unusual activity with brooms and pails next door, but I did not learn the cause until Alain Lebras called me to the terrace later in the morning.

"Do you see that man on the Semaphore platform? The one in khaki? You can't make it out from here, but"—his voice sank to a reverent whisper—"he's got three stars!"

He could hardly wait to tell me the rest—how he, Alain Lebras, only a private in the last war—though by rights he should have been a corporal—had touched the hand of a three-star General! He even clinked glasses with him in the café where the General stopped for refreshment.

"Told him I was sixty-one, but ready to volunteer tomorrow if they'd take me. '*Très bien, mon brave,*' he said, 'France is proud of men like you.' Proud, he said, and slapped me on the shoulder. I might have been a General myself, the way he treated me."

Alain was fairly bursting with importance. He repeated the story to Alice Bozec who was passing with

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ier cows, and told it all over again in the kitchen to Marie-Anaik.

“Do you see that?” He held out his hard brown palm. “It’s shaken hands with a General.”

Marie-Anaik seemed curiously unimpressed.

“I saw him,” she said calmly. “A fat little man, and pleasant spoken. He was here in the kitchen.”

Alain’s sails dropped. For a moment he merely stared. Then, “What was he doing in the kitchen?”

“Drinking coffee. He said he hadn’t tasted as good coffee in weeks.”

That was Marie-Anaik all over. Had her guest been the President of the Republic, it would have been the same. A President is a President. A General is a General. Marie-Anaik is Marie-Anaik. Each has his place in the world.

Christmas came, with an extra ration of wine, a goose Marie-Anaik contributed and baskets of good things from wives on the mainland for the soldiers’ Christmas Eve supper. There was no midnight mass in the village, because of the blackout, but we heard it over the radio from a casemate in the Maginot Line. “*Adeste, fideles,*” sang the distant voices, poignantly young, while the announcer played up the grim setting, and Marie-Anaik listened reverently, a faraway look in her eyes. She gave a start of annoyance when the bugles shrilled the elevation of the Host.

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"That's the way it always is in a military mass," the Sergeant explained.

Marie-Anaik nodded doubtfully.

"Yes, it's military," she repeated, "but it would have scared the baby in the manger."

January brought with it a third meatless day a week and frequent shortages of coffee, oil and soap. It brought cold weather too, with flurries of snow. The soldiers stuffed straw in their sabots and stopped complaining that their boots had not come. Artilleryman Marcel wrote in his weekly letter from the front that he'd had his feet "frozen stiff." Hospitals were filling with pneumonia and bronchitis cases. Madame la Colonelle began collecting pennies for the *vin chaud du soldat*. In every cottage women knitted for the troops.

Then came the February rains, days of unbroken downpour, filling the cisterns to overflowing, stripping the paths down to the naked granite. To island houses, water is a mightier enemy than cold. While gutters and cistern pipes gurgle, the rain slides stealthily under the door and slips around the window frames. It finds every loosened slate on the roof, every weak joint in the mortar. Dark splotches appear on plaster walls and drops drum on the attic floor. The old houses "give" in the winter storms; every year new gaps open for the water to filter through. In the lulls between

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downpours, Alain swarmed over my house like a wood-pecker, tapping and sounding, "caulking the seams."

That February, a spring welled up suddenly in a corner of the living room. It started as a modest trickle, at the base of the wall, but when Alain's probing tool dislodged a flake of plaster, the effect was like Moses striking the rock. In an hour the ground floor had become a lake. Amélie maintained it was a "sign"—she did not specify of what. "When springs start flowing or dry up, it always points to something," she said, in one of her ominous tones. Alain suggested building a fountain in the corner of the room, with water dripping from a shell and a spillway under the floor. Wouldn't that be a pretty idea? He had always wanted to try his hand at a fountain. The curé had one in his garden but it sometimes froze in the winter. In the house, a fountain would not freeze.

"But it might dry up after the rains," I objected.

"Yes, so it might," Alain agreed regretfully. "And then where would we be? Work and money gone for nothing."

We compromised on the spillway. For days the room looked like a construction job for a city sewer. A trench led diagonally across the floor and ended at a tunnel where Alain had burrowed through the wall in his effort to locate the spring.

"Looks as if you'd received a bomb," the sentry said,

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squatting on his heels outside and speaking through the wall.

Marie-Anaik came to view the ruins.

"The soldiers couldn't have made a worse mess, if they'd lived here."

Alain dug and burrowed contentedly. He found the spring, built a beautiful cemented drain and repaired the damage. But what confirmed Amélie in her belief that the whole thing had been a portent was that from the day the drain was finished, not a drop of water passed through it. Marie-Anaik worried that it might reappear in another spot. But Alain had no fear of that.

"It's found a bed it likes better," he said. "Water is a queer thing. It likes to find its own way."

The day the work was finished, Alain asked for his pay.

"Don't give it to her," he said. "I want it for myself." Then, as if he thought that extravagant request needed explanation, he volunteered it. "I think I'll cross with Gonidec to the continent tomorrow. He's going home on leave."

Alain left to spend a day on the mainland, but he was gone for ten. When Gonidec returned from his day's leave he told us with a grin that Alain had decided to "go visiting." "Maybe he'll push on to Lorient and see Yves. He says he's fed up with the island. He's going to see what's happening in the world."

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"You don't suppose he went off to enlist?" I asked Marie-Anaik.

She shook her head.

"That's only talk. They'd never take him anyhow at his age. In a week or so, he'll turn up again. Every year it's the same. It's his temperament, I guess. He always turns restless when spring comes."

Spring—the first yellow buds on the gorse, the grass growing green and ragged under the rain, brown beds in the garden pierced with slender shoots. Spring had come—the first spring we ever dreaded.

Alain brought grave rumors when he returned to the island. He had been at Lorient and Brest. And yes, he had seen Yves, now a full-fledged marine who had changed his mind again and abandoned planes for submarines. When the time came to make his choice, he found he could not give up the sea. But that was not the important news.

"Brest is full of ships—men of war, torpedo boats and destroyers, thick as herring. And freighters loading guns, and the whole country swarming with soldiers." There were *chasseurs alpins*, he said, and foreign troops, legionnaires and Poles, coming in by train-loads. They wore queer uniforms: capes, short coats lined with sheepskin, and socks rolled in welts at the tops of their boots. And they carried pairs of long slats, curved at the tips. . . .

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Skis—I exchanged glances with Gonidec who stood beside me in the kitchen.

“Does that mean—Finland?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“It may be. The Lieutenant said something—”

“I ate pancakes with two *chasseurs*. They told me they were going to a cold country,” Alain went on. “Maybe it won’t be so cold there, now that winter’s past.”

By noon, the news had spread over the entire island. The Colonel came all the way up the Semaphore hill to interview Alain.

“We’re going to beat Hitler in Finland,” Alain told him.

“Yes—three months too late,” the Colonel grunted. “The war will be over before we get there.”

It was. The Colonel excepted, the island received the Finnish peace with distinct relief. As Gonidec said, “What if the Russians did play us dirt? I can’t see the point of forcing them to fight us; we’ve got enough on our hands with the Boches.”

From Paris came news of other spring ferment. Paul Reynaud stepped into Monsieur Daladier’s shoes as President of the Council. That was a sign things were going to move faster, people said. Marie-Anaik recalled speeches the former Finance Minister had made over the radio.

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"Reynaud does sound smarter," she agreed. His first speech as Premier disappointed her.

"He's turned as solemn as Monsieur Daladier himself; sounds just like the curé when he steps into the pulpit. Why can't a cabinet minister talk like an ordinary man? Preachifying isn't going to win the war."

We could only conjecture what had prompted the change of ministers, but the fact itself was disturbing. It showed something was seriously wrong "on top," Gonidec said. "Perhaps Daladier wanted to fight the war in Finland. This may mean we're going to start something on our own front. It's about time, I'd say."

But the *drôle de guerre* still avoided the home front in its hunt for a battlefield. It clung obstinately to the north. I was on the train returning from a flying trip to Paris when I read the news of the invasion of Denmark and the landing of German troops in Norway. I translated the headlines to a British Tommy who sat beside me. At first he refused to believe it.

"The Fleet wouldn't let it happen," he said confidently. "Though if it's true, we'll have to go over to Norway and stop them. I wouldn't mind going myself. I'm spoiling for a shot at the Jerries."

One April morning a fortnight or so later, a sailor from the Semaphore stopped me on the path.

"Your husband's ship is in Brest, Madame. I saw

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her yesterday in the harbor. I thought you would like to know."

He refused to let me question him.

"That's all I'm supposed to tell you. You'll find out the rest when you get there. But if you want to see the Captain, you'd better hurry."

By noon I was on the way to Brest.

I reached the war port in the late afternoon. As the train emptied, I noticed it carried few civilians. Most of the latter were women like myself, carrying no baggage except a small hand-bag. Navy wives, hurrying to Brest for a glimpse of their sailors; brought there, no doubt, by one of the mysterious codes that outwit even wartime prescriptions. The other passengers were military, but for once, sailors formed a minority. Swarms of *chasseurs alpins* poured out on the platform and more showed their heads in the doors of freight cars at the rear of the train. Non-coms stood at the gates, shouting: "Hundred and twenty-first here; Seventy-third to the right!" A camp kitchen rumbled past; from one of the cars, skis clattered to the cement.

As I came out of the station, almost the first thing I saw was the Captain's ship. She lay at the commercial docks below the ramparts, behind piles of cases and rows of army trucks. Lighters hugged her free side, their flat surfaces crowded with barrels. Her cranes dipped and swung. She was loading as I had often seen

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her load before at her berth at Cape Pinède. But this was no peacetime cargo. As one of the cranes swung in above the open hatch, I saw what it carried: a field gun.

Along the jetty a row of destroyers lay at their moorings. Beyond, the harbor was dotted with gray ships: freighters, low down on the water; more destroyers; cruisers, their tripod masts cutting fantastic patterns against the sky; an airplane carrier—huge lopsided monster.

Below, at the entrance of the docks, a sentry stopped me.

“Can’t pass, lady. Sorry.”

I had expected that. I looked vainly for a familiar face. Then I tried the post office. There, too, I met a wall.

“No telegrams accepted for ships.”

“But I know the ship is here. I saw her.”

The employee, a sharp-faced girl, favored me with an acid smile.

“That’s just the point. You are not supposed to know.”

I dropped a special-delivery letter in the box, without much hope it would be delivered. After that, there was nothing left to do but walk the streets of Brest and hope for a chance meeting. In the Café Continental, navy officers sat in groups. I scanned their faces

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eagerly. Not a friend. Many were accompanied by their wives, luckier wives than I. I longed to ask them how they had met.

At the next table, two couples were drinking champagne.

"Here's hoping we'll find warm weather up there!  
At any rate, we're going to make it hot for someone."

"Think of us, this time tomorrow."

Tomorrow—that word sent me hurrying into the street. Streets, cafés, back to the docks where the ship was still loading, only a hundred yards away in the discreet light of black-out lamps. Luck was against me. At ten o'clock I gave up the quest, only to take it up again the next morning. Along the docks, other ships were taking on cargo, but the hatches of "my" ship were closed, and up the gang-plank marched figures in uniform. On the pier below, hundreds more stood waiting, massed like sheep in a pen. In a few hours at most, she would weigh anchor. . . .

Again there was nothing to do but tramp the main street of Brest from the post office to the bridge above the arsenal and back again, each time with a little less hope, a growing disbelief in the kindness of Providence. But there I was unjust. On the stroke of noon, as I turned away from the post office for what I promised myself was the last trip down the crowded street, I came face to face with the Captain.

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“You—” His stare was a mixture of wonder, delight—and anger. “*Why* didn’t you let me know?”

Yes, why? The post office, the sentry—

“But you could have explained to the sentry. He would have passed on the word to someone. Oh, if only you were a Brittany woman!”

Three hours later I watched his ship edge away from shore and move out towards the outer harbor, while a band played lustily and an admiral and his escort stood at attention on the pier. When night came, flashes blinked across the water, the sharp silhouette of a destroyer glided into the lead, and one by one the convoyed ships fell into line, pale blots in the haze, moving towards the entrance of the harbor. The French Expeditionary Force had left for Norway.

That day—only that day—the war began for me.

I think it began too for every woman on the island whose man was at sea. Few knew for certain, but all suspected they were “up there in the north where the fighting was”—sea fighting that always seemed more real to us than fighting on land.

Again the radio became the pivot of our day. We listened fearfully, but we dared not miss a broadcast. We counted: ten days for the trip up the coast, ten days for the return, perhaps ten days more—a month, on waters studded with mines, swarming with U-boats. When I tried to picture “my” ship, she seemed as frag-

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ile as a box, a cardboard box, carrying guns. More than my neighbors, whose fears clung to the sea, I thought of planes. The vulnerable roof of the bridge. . . .

A month would pass before we could draw a free breath, sleep a night through. Afterwards, it would begin again, the long waits, the dread of communiqués and broadcasts, the longing to shut one's eyes and ears, to run away and forget—and never be able to forget. That was war. Ships would travel back and forth to Norway, since the expeditionary force was there. The life-line must be maintained.

Not that we forgot the men, landed at the end of some fjord and left there in the snow to fight. But still, our hearts were with the ships. As Marie-Anaik said, our own came first.

Yet, as the days passed, something happened to each of us. There remained at the core of our fears, the dread for one man, but it merged with a vaster dread, equally poignant but less personal: our fear for France. As I look back, I realize it was already there—the first dim shadow of something immense and sinister that threatened us.

It began mounting with the campaign in Norway.

In spite of the guarded statements of the press and the ambiguous optimism of broadcasters, even we could see that the Norway campaign was “queer.” Our

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troops lacked heavy guns, lacked planes, lacked means of transport. There were no landing fields. Why?

The Colonel gave us the answer.

*“Parbleu*—the Germans got there first! We let them cut the grass under our feet!” And bitterly, “Too late for Finland, too late in Norway. Always too late—” Once, as we tried to interpret a particularly cryptic communiqué, he let fall a phrase that for him was downright blasphemy.

“Something has happened to the Army—it’s not the Army of Verdun and the Marne.”

The Colonel made frequent trips up the hill those days. He had taken to wearing his decorations—a row of ribbons on the left breast of a coat with a vaguely military cut. That was after the War Ministry refused—with flattering appreciations—his offer to take up service again. “Though I’m not a day older than Weygand,” he said wrathfully; Weygand, whom “they” had retired to Syria. The politicians of “this government of ours” had shelved all the men of value.

He would sit on the low wall before the Post, sketching a map of Norway in the dust with his cane, while Gonidec and a group of soldiers looked on respectfully.

“We’re cut off here and here. They halt us at Steinkjer; they’re pushing through to Trondheim. If we can’t get control of Trondheim Fjord, we might as well go home.”

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"That's so, that's the truth, *mon Colonel*," Gonidec would agree. "But if we have to bring them home, I hope we'll do it in time."

Soon the Colonel gave up his lectures on Norway. One day we heard the expeditionary force was being withdrawn. The campaign had ended. He spoke of it now as a "monumental blunder" and found a degree of comfort in laying its failure to the British. "The British never were generals."

May 10—the news of the invasion of the Low Countries crashed on the island like a bombshell.

"Well, it's begun," the Lieutenant said that morning when he came on his tour of inspection. His voice took on a sharper tone—almost a military bark—as he gave Gonidec orders to clean out the trenches by the sea wall (they dated from the last war and were choked with ferns and briars) as an eventual shelter for civilians.

"And see that the houses here are blacked out properly. They all have windows on the sea."

That night I missed a familiar flash from the southwest horizon. The powerful Héaux Light was extinguished. Our own beacon wore a black curtain on the side towards the island. Its beam no longer skipped across the garden. There was something ominously suggestive in that growing shadow.

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But for me—and that very night—came a ray of light: a telegram, “Safe in port. Hope for news.” It came from the naval post office; no port was mentioned, but the “hope for news” could only mean one thing.

So I saw Brest again. Sirens screamed as the train pulled into the station. They screamed again the night I left: growl to shriek, shriek to growl, as if war itself gave tongue. Between those two clamors, we had three days. . . .

There can be nothing calmer than the atmosphere of a war port in wartime. Brest once more belonged to the Navy and war is the Navy’s “business.” The soldiers had gone, the town was quieter, one had the feeling it was stripped for action.

No freighters lay in the harbor. “They’re cleared as fast as they come in,” the Captain said. I did not need to ask why. The gray destroyers slipped in and out like restless ghosts, one or two at a time. The cruisers had vanished; they were “somewhere outside.” Only the new *Richelieu*, her armament incomplete, lay at the Arsenal dock, by André’s ship.

At the Café Continental one saw fewer officers, fewer wives. There was no drinking of champagne. Discussion at the tables sounded coolly dispassionate. Battle engaged in the north? *Tant mieux.* This meant action at last. This at last was war.

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When night fell, the sailors took over the streets in strolling bands, filling the darkness with laughter and young voices. Behind the blacked-out doors of the pancake shops, one heard singing. The smell of pancakes and cider filtered through the curtains.

Three days. On the third, at sunset, I saw the ship pass again into the outer harbor, though this time there was no band on the pier, no admiral to speed her on her way. She moved across the bay unaccompanied and headed for the Narrows. Destination unknown.

Two hours earlier I had waved good-by to the Captain, as the Navy launch, bright with polished brass, swung away from the pontoon and headed for the jetty, its flag stiff in the breeze. It was like our leave-taking in June the year before: the launch—André's tall figure hidden at last by the tricolor. . . . Perhaps it had been an omen, after all. The war we dreaded had come. . . . And this time?

May 14, 1940. Today it is May 14, 1941 . . . and the Captain is still at sea. Like the great war port, confident in its watchful strength, I had no real inkling, that day in Brest, of what the year would bring.

## 9. June Tragedy

DOWN the hill from the Semaphore came a slow-moving figure, a dark patch against the green. From the path I was following along the inlet, I watched it descend, draw nearer and take on body. It was a civilian in a suit of Sunday black; no neighbor surely, yet the bulky silhouette and the walk were vaguely familiar. At the foot of the slope the man paused, removed his hat and mopped his face with a checkered handkerchief. As he lifted his arm, a vivid splotch of red and white shone out between his coat lapels—a broad tricolored band worn diagonally across his vest. I recognized him then. It was the Mayor—and his sash.

Rooted to the path, I waited.

“Who—?”

The Mayor came nearer, panted a breathy *bu-h-h!* and stared down at his dusty shoes.

“Alice Bozec’s man. He was on the *Bison*. I have just been up to tell her. It’s a terrible duty—” He mopped his hot cheeks again.

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Etienne Bozec. . . . His white boat lay beached only a few yards away on the sand floor of the inlet. He had taken me mackerel fishing during his last leave. He had promised to take me out again the "next time." Now there would be no next time. . . .

"He's the first to go," the Mayor said heavily.  
"*Pauvre gars.*"

"Our Etienne," the neighbors called him—it was a way of showing our resentment at his wife's treatment of her man. "If he were a bad one, she'd have some excuse," Alain used to say. "Though when a woman gets a bad husband she's sure to dote on him. Look at Pauline Legall." Marie-Anaik, tolerant as always, stood up for Alice. "She can't help her tongue. She's an island woman and stronger willed than some." Perhaps Marie-Anaik was right, yet that tongue of Alice's had made her man's life a "nor'east blow" every time he came ashore. There everyone agreed. Now she could torment him no longer. Lost off the Norway coast, when the Republic he loved and defended needed him most. Alice the strong-willed was free.

The gate of Alice's garden stood open. "Alice's garden," "Alice's man"—involuntarily I was thinking in the island way. Though the garden was so evidently a sailor's garden and the house, a sailor's house. There were the flowerbeds bordered with white-washed peb-

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bles, the neat sanded paths, the bright blue window frames, the anchor at the door—

Beyond the whitened stones that framed the doorway, I made out a familiar bonnet. Amélie, her hands crossed on her apron band, her face creased in vertical folds, was administering comfort. Alain Lebras stood facing her, clutching his cap in both fists (it takes a major tragedy for Alain to uncover his head). Between them, Alice Bozec sat on a bench, ashen-faced and rigid, a sheet of blue paper on her knees, a sickle at her feet.

“I was cutting clover for the rabbits. Etienne brought them from Brest his last leave. They’re almost big enough to eat. He likes—” She caught her breath.

“Now, Alice,” Amélie chided, “that’s not the way. Etienne was a good man, as men go—” She paused, her sharp little eyes on the widow’s face, sounding the effect of her words.

From stone, Alice Bozec’s face grew suddenly alive. She turned on her comforter.

“*Tais-toi!* You can’t understand. You never had a man.” She burst into noisy sobbing.

Alain Lebras laid an awkward hand on her shoulder.

“Alice,” he said huskily. “Dying at war isn’t just dying. It’s . . . it’s for France.” This, without a trace of his occasional grandiloquence. A simple statement of fact.

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So war planted its standard on the island. It flew half-mast from the flagpole at Alice's gate, where Etienne liked to hoist the colors. Alain found the flag and ran it halfway up the staff, in spite of Amélie's objections. It was no time for the tricolor to fly at half-mast, she said.

From the hillock by the lighthouse the sentry called to me.

"Oh, Madame, the *patronne* has come!"

At the door of the Post, a slim scarlet figure in a Brittany fisher's suit stood in a circle of horizon blue uniforms, like a tanager among jays. It was Cécile. She broke from the ring and ran towards me.

"I drove down this morning, with half of Paris. Luckily I had gas. I hadn't touched my month's ration. Can you take in a refugee?"

Could I? I hugged her joyfully.

"They"—with a nod towards the soldiers—"have been showing me the 'château.' *Une horreur!*" She grimaced, her back to the men. "But they are so sweet about it, poor things. I'm going to buy them a new broom."

I told her then how sorry I was it had been her house, not mine. If I had realized—Cécile cut me short.

"Don't be silly. Of course you couldn't give up

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*Cœur à l'Ancre.* It's your home. My house—well, so far it's only an adventure."

"Have you seen Alain?"

"Not yet. Marie-Anaik says he's hiding. Poor man, he takes everything so to heart."

"He's not hiding. I saw him at Alice Bozec's. Perhaps you haven't heard—"

Cécile's face sobered.

"The Sergeant told me. It's one of the things you can't believe, like all the rest that's happening." She shivered. "If you had seen the roads this morning . . . and the trains. . . ."

"What are people saying in Paris?"

"No one knows what to say—or think. Everyone who can is leaving. Father heard Reynaud is changing the cabinet again. Daladier shelved, or almost; Pétain, Vice-Premier—"

"But Pétain must be a hundred."

"Eighty-four—just grandfather's age, but minus the wheel chair. They say the army keeps you young. And Weygand replaces Gamelin."

"What news of Jean?" (Jean is Cécile's husband.)

"Nothing since it began. I'm afraid he's in Flanders. And the Captain?"

"Somewhere at sea."

"And the Germans at Sedan. Sedan again . . . like

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a bad omen. Only we mustn't believe it. In Heaven's name, what—" She clutched my arm.

Down the hill from the Semaphore, someone came running, skirts about her knees, shawl billowing from her thin arms like bat wings. Amélie's voice, a siren wail, reached us before she did.

"*Malheur, malheur,* they've broken through the Line!"

One comforting thing about Amélie—her versions of fact are so calamitous that the facts themselves when you learn them seem tame in comparison. This time the truth was serious enough, but as the radio took pains to point out, if the Meuse defenses had "given" at Sedan and between Montmédy and Namur, it was a bulge rather than a breach, a "hernia" that undoubtedly could be choked off. We waited hopefully for the "choking." In the meantime, Holland succumbed; on May 17, Brussels was occupied. Then for three days the radio fell curiously taciturn. Our troops were "resisting bravely," "counter-attacking furiously," "straightening their line." At last a halting admission . . . they were "falling back to new defenses—according to plan." Falling back . . . ?

The sentry came to lean across the wall.

"What do the English say?"

As usual, London gave the news before Paris. A

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British voice, unalterably calm: "German troops have reached St. Quentin."

We stared aghast. St. Quentin—only eighty miles from Paris! From then on the living room was rarely empty. Neighbors and soldiers crowded in to listen, standing in sober groups about the radio, like visitors at a death bed. "What do the English say?" The news trickled in hour by hour, blacker and blacker. Would there never be an item of good news? "The Allies have retaken Arras." A ray of hope—soon shattered. "The Germans are at Abbeville." Abbeville—they had reached the coast. And our men cut off in Flanders!

Marie-Télégramme dropped in to ask for news.

"Flanders—that's where Marcel, my boy, is."

Cécile slipped an arm about her shoulders.

"Mine, too."

It must have been the next day, or the day after, that Marie-Anaik came across the lane at suppertime to ask us for beds.

"René is here with all his family. He brought them on his tug from Le Havre." (René is Marie-Anaik's second son.)

Moored at the entrance of the inlet, two Havre tugs were unloading children and bundles. The sight of those chunky black things with their smoking stacks against a background of Brittany rocks instead of wharves and warehouses, did more to bring events in

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the north home to us than all the radio broadcasts. Marie-Anaik herself could scarcely grasp it. She looked stunned.

"Here from Le Havre," she repeated. "Without orders or papers. Just picked up and left."

A tugboat captain, a ship, putting out to sea without "papers," like a man starting out on a walk! To Marie-Anaik it was more than a symbol. The structure of her world was cracking.

"The Germans are raining bombs on Le Havre. On Cherbourg, too. They couldn't put in there. They lost one tug on the way, but they saved her crew. René doesn't know where to go now."

I asked her what she planned to do with her refugees. Could we be of help? At that, her face lost its blank look.

"There's no need," she said briskly. "I've moved out the clutter from the storeroom. Alain and René can sleep in the attic. Thank you just the same."

"But four children, a mother and grandmother—"

Marie-Anaik shot me a humorous look.

"I may be asking you yet to take in René's mother-in-law. She's already begun bossing Alain and he won't stand for that—not from a stranger."

Back and forth our attention see-sawed, from the tragedy in the north to island happenings that reflected it. Every day brought more refugees, forerunners of

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the floods to come. They fled across country in cars and chartered buses, or traveled in motor boats and sailing craft down the coast. Amélie at last found refugees to shelter—a painter and his wife from Paris. The man couldn't stand the sirens, she said. He had been shell-shocked in the last war. Amélie still called them "tourists"; they were "voluntary refugees" who could pay for their keep. She announced that bit of news, so elated by her good fortune she almost forgot to report what the chief at the Semaphore had just heard from Brest—the capitulation of the Belgian king.

June came. We were given our first food cards, for sugar only. At Post Number Three, six soldiers out of sixteen received new uniforms after months of waiting. They were summer uniforms of cotton khaki, with long trousers like the British, but no boots came with them. The lucky six bought rope-soled sandals out of their own money. Their disgruntled comrades still wore sabots.

The radio news was all of battles. Battle on the Somme; battle on the Aisne. "Our troops are falling back in order." When would they stop retreating? Somewhere the Army must make its stand. We listened and commented and all the time we were thinking: Dunkirk. We pictured the men on the beaches, the sky throbbing with planes, the rescuing ships. Cécile's Jean, Marie-Télégramme's Marcel, waiting

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among the crowds on the shore; and perhaps on the sea, Marie-Anaik's Auguste, Yves, the Captain. Perhaps they all were there.

Those days, when I met Marie-Télégramme in the lane, she would bring up with a start, as if waking from a dream. "I'm praying," she explained. "Every minute of the day, every step. Holy Virgin, Mother of God—" She plodded on again, lips moving, her eyes on the path.

Cécile and I sat hours on end by the radio. We dared not leave it. "But we must find something to do or we'll go mad," Cécile said. We tried knitting, but it kept only our fingers busy and even the fingers did strange things to the stitches. Then we turned to chess. That was better, but even in the chess world we still fought the Battle of France. Each of us was France, pitting her wits and her strategy against the enemy. No matter who won, we said invariably: "Hitler lost that one." In the long silences while one of the players pondered her next move, the fingers of the other went automatically to the radio. "What do you suppose they are saying now?"

I shall never see a chess board again without recalling those June afternoons—the patch of sunlight on the east wall slowly turning red, the dog's warm nose on my foot, Cécile's bent head across the table and Marie-Anaik at her elbow, apparently intent on the

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game, but with a faraway, listening look that showed where her thoughts were.

Marie-Anaik was often with us. She looked drawn and old, those days. But it was not fatigue, she said stoutly, though the “county fair” at home—seventeen soldiers, six children, and Alain and the old lady “locking horns from morning to night”—was sometimes more than . . . well, there was a home-front to every war, she guessed. If things on the fighting front could only take a turn for the better, she would willingly put up with a regiment of soldiers and even another mother-in-law of René’s, though a second regiment would be easier to handle.

“If only something good happens to France, I’ll never let myself feel unhappy about anything again. Never as long as I live,” she said. That was June 10, the day we heard the Germans had reached Rouen, that Reynaud had sent his first appeal to President Roosevelt and that Italy had entered the war.

Next door at Post Number Three the soldiers, too, sought escape from the hours of sterile waiting. For the first time in months, they asked to be set to work. Forbidden to leave the immediate vicinity of the Post, they started spading Cécile’s meadow to make a garden. The soil had not been turned for thirty years and over it lay a matted blanket of gorse, brakes and briars. Knee-deep in an ever-widening trench, the men

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grubbed and dug, cursing the thorns and dragging out the black fern roots with the feverish zeal of a "gang of sappers under fire," the Sergeant said. To complete the illusion, their guns stood in a row along the wall, always within reach.

Gonidec, too, found something to keep him busy. He sat astride the wall, adjusting the wings of a toy airplane he had whittled. It was not a toy, but a target, he pointed out. He meant to set it up on a pole and let the men take a crack at it with their rifles. "We may have a chance at a real one someday," he said, with a naïve earnestness that staggered Marie-Anaik.

"If that's the sort of whittling we've been doing on the front, no wonder the Germans are where they are."

When the Lieutenant came on the morning of June 11, he ordered the men to cease work in the garden and set them leveling one side of the hillock in an angle where two walls joined. They covered the walls with sods and planted a stout post deep in the ground. It was a machine-gun nest, Gonidec told us. They were going to set up their gun there and every day he would give the men a lecture on "theory." Few if any of the soldiers knew how a machine-gun worked.

"But it's late in the day," he fretted. "We ought to have started this months ago."

That belated "whittling" with the machine-gun (it never got beyond a few introductory lectures) was the

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first and only attempt to give the soldiers anything like military drill in all the nine months they spent on the island.

All the while the marvelous June weather continued. Not a cloud overhead; not a breath of wind stirring the brakes on the moor. Beyond the rocks, the Channel slept like a lizard in the sun, its smooth green skin lifting and sinking, to the rhythm of the tides. There seemed considerable justification for Marie-Anaik's "Either God doesn't care, or He must be on the other side."

In any case, He was not with France. France had entered the tunnel, was moving deeper and deeper into the darkness. Only a little light ahead. "Weygand orders stand or die." Men died, other men retreated. The Germans swept on down the coast, along the Seine Valley towards Paris. "The Government has abandoned Paris."

Refugees reached Brittany by thousands. The entire north was moving towards us, trapped on the crowded roads by low-flying planes, sleeping in fields and ditches, pushing on. Annie Prigent's sister reached us from Lille, her right arm shattered by a machine-gun bullet. At Alice Bozec's, a haggard woman lay stunned and silent, like a bit of cast-up flotsam. She had left her dead child under a tree by the roadside. We took in a Belgian for the night—how he reached the island

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even he could not tell us. He had “come along with the others.” The next morning he was gone, wandering off again in search of his wife and three children lost somewhere on the road.

Often from below the horizon came a faraway rumble like thunder. Sometimes heavy reports set the windows jingling. One night we heard a new sound in the sky—the throbbing woo-woo-woo of German planes.

By that time Cécile and I had put away the chess board. The soldiers no longer dug in Cécile’s meadow. They hung about in the garden of *Cœur à l’Ancre* or, leaving their sabots at the door, tiptoed in on stockinginged feet to stand in a circle about the radio.

“Reynaud appeals to America.” For all its poignancy, there was something that shocked and dismayed us in that desperate appeal—almost an ultimatum. It sounded like an excuse, a pretext to give up the battle and lay the blame elsewhere. Did Churchill sense it when he made his offer? “Every French citizen will become by right a British citizen; every British citizen, French.” Then blackness again. An old man’s voice: “France . . . will work out her destiny alone . . . with the help of no one. . . . I am compelled . . . to ask for an armistice . . . soldier speaking to soldier . . . with honor.” . . . “Honor”? Lights out in the tunnel. A separate peace. . . .



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The day dawned dewy and clear, a skylark hung twittering high above the roof. Then the noise of an approaching plane drowned out the bird's song. No German plane this time—a long even drone. I heard Gonidec call:

“They’ve dropped a flare!” and almost without transition, his voice swelling to a shout, “To your posts!”

Voices, the clatter of sabots on wooden floors, the thud of running feet. I leaned from the window. The air smelled of roses. Below in the garden, the tall delphiniums and foxgloves moved gently in the morning breeze. In the path stood Marie-Anaik, the tragic look she had worn since the evening before etched deeper by a sleepless night.

Her voice rang incredulous. “They say we’re going to be bombed.”

She pointed to a column of smoke that rose from the Semaphore hill.

“The sailors have orders to burn everything and leave. A launch is waiting for them in the inlet.”

Cécile and I hurried into our clothes. When we reached the garden Marie-Anaik had gone. But on the hillock the Sergeant and his men were setting up their machine-gun. The Corporal dashed past, bands of cartridges on his arm.

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“Better get away from here, ladies. Things may get hot.”

A sentry stood at the end of the path. It was Hervé, tall and stiff in his new khaki uniform.

“Hervé, what on earth—”

He glanced uneasily towards the Sergeant.

“Don’t speak to me. We’re not supposed to talk with civilians,” he muttered between closed lips.

We pushed on towards the Semaphore. Sailors hurried in and out, their arms full of bundles. Signal flags, charts, flares, instruments—all went on the bonfire.

“What do you suppose they’ve done with their munitions?”

“Dumped them into the sea, or hidden them in the ferns. Or maybe they’re taking them along.”

Amélie’s gate swung open with a crash, and a wheelbarrow bumped across the threshold. It was piled with a roped mountain of things—bedding, an armchair, a clock, a couple of vases. Amélie gripped the handles, lifting the heavy load with astonishing ease. Behind her came the painter, a canvas under each arm and a bag in either hand. His wife followed, hugging an armful of dresses. Her face was ashen.

“Terrible, it’s terrible! We lost all we own in Paris; now they bomb us here. . . . Oh, God, they’re coming!”

From the eastern horizon mounted the uneven drone

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of German planes. It swelled and swelled, filled the sky with its roaring. In perhaps thirty seconds they were over us: five, ten, twenty planes, flying low in formations of five, black crosses on their silver wings. Instinctively we ducked. The painter's wife sank back against the wall, her arms sagging, the sleeves of a chiffon evening gown trailing at her feet. A rifle cracked on the hillock, a solitary shot. "Imbeciles—they'll have us all massacred," she whimpered.

The planes passed over.

"Hurry, Berthe, hurry," the painter called. His wife gathered up her dresses from the dust and fled down the lane. "You'd better join us," she cried over her shoulder. "Pierre has found a place by the inlet among the rocks. You can't miss it."

The sky shuddered again. More planes roared over, on their way to the mainland. Again they passed; almost at once came a screaming whistle that shrilled louder and louder and ended in a muffled roar.

Cécile and I exchanged glances.

"That was meant for the tugs."

The ground shook with explosions. The planes were bombing the airfield across the Narrows.

"Look! The sailors are leaving!"

In twos and threes from the Semaphore gate, men in blue dashed down the path towards the inlet. There was something more upsetting in the sight of those

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unning figures than in all the panic of our neighbors or the planes in the sky. We hurried back over the lane. We ran. On the hillock, the soldiers still stood about their machine-gun. Within the gate, the nodding flowers, the hum of bees in the sun—*Cœur à l'Ancre*. It looked so safe and still. A plane climbed up the sky. From the door we saw it, high above the Semaphore, circling like a hawk. I threw a few things into a handbag—papers, money, the Captain's picture in its leather frame.

The Lieutenant stood at the gate, squinting up at the mounting plane. It climbed up and up, then swooped in a screaming dive, passed out of sight behind the hill.

“What can we hope to do, against such things?” he muttered. And to us, “You'd better hurry, Mesdames. If anything drops, it will be here or at the Semaphore.”

It was our turn to take the path to the inlet. We hurried by the Semaphore, its doors open, the bonfire smoking on the rocks. Then past the Colonel's trees. It was still and warm in the lee of the hill. The air smelt of pine needles. Through the network of branches, we saw someone in the garden—the Colonel, seated tranquilly on the steps of a summer-house, a long spy-glass in his hand. Cécile spoke over her shoulder.

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"I feel like a fool."

We felt even more foolish when we reached the inlet. There in a deep cleft in the rocks, like a row of sea anemones, sat the painter, his wife, five unknown women and a man. Half the cleft was filled with their belongings, covered over with a layer of bracken. Each of the eight clutched a bunch of big ferns, holding it above his head like a green parasol.

Cécile looked at them. "I can't," she whispered.

"From the air, they'll take us for seaweed. But you must not stand there. In your white dresses, you'll draw their fire." The painter edged over to make a place for us, but the woman who sat beside him resisted with a push of her shoulders.

"You can see yourself there's no room," she snapped. This was addressed to us.

We hastened to agree. We assured them we had no intention of crowding their shelter. There were other rocks on the shore of the inlet. We climbed back over the rocks and Cécile headed into the path again. "I'm going home," she said. Beyond the pines, the Colonel still sat on the steps of the summer-house. As two planes zoomed over, flying from west to east, he adjusted his long spy-glass. I suggested we join him, but Cécile shook her head. "Not with these things," she said, with a wave of her handbag. "I'd die of shame."

We climbed to the top of the hill again and passed

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on down the slope towards the lighthouse. There Cécile gave a gasping little cry.

"Look at them—*France quand même!*!" She sank down in the grass, laughing hysterically, and two tears—the first she had shed—gathered at the corners of her lids and dripped down her cheeks.

In the field below the lighthouse, Alain Lebras, Marie-Anaik, 'Guitte and Anne-Elise were turning hay, tossing it with their wooden forks, turning and spreading. France might forfeit her pledges, go down in lonely defeat, German Stukas scream over the island like gulls; the hay was cut. Cut, it had to be turned.

"There's a fork for each of you," Marie-Anaik said by way of welcome. And with a glint of her old humor, "You can leave your valuables there in the ditch. They'll be safe there. If they blow up, we'll all go with them."

Throughout the morning, beneath a sky that quivered and roared, while anti-aircraft guns barked on the mainland, and bursts of thunder shook the eastern horizon, we helped with the hay. At noon we lunched in the shade on bread and butter, cheese and cider, since—to quote Marie-Anaik—"that ninny of a Lieutenant turned us out of doors." When lunch was over, the Lebras family took up their hay forks again. Cécile worked with them to the last, her face and neck beaded with sweat, her drenched dress clinging to her shoul-

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ders. "This is better than chess," she said, showing me her blistered hands.

As the afternoon wore on, fewer planes passed. Finally, none at all. The horizon rumbled for the last time. It was suddenly very still—a sunny June afternoon, with a few sudsy clouds strewn along the skyline like foam.

A man in khaki bicycled up the lane. He halted his wheel on the edge of the field and beckoned. It was the Parisian.

"I guess you can come home now. I'm not supposed to tell you—the Boches are at St. Brieuc."

We left the forks in the hay field and followed in his wake. The Lieutenant stood by the machine-gun in the group of soldiers, a slip of yellow paper in his hand. He read it, read it again, gave his mustache a desperate tug, drew a long breath—

"Well, *mes enfants*, it seems the game is up. The forces in Brittany lay down their arms."

A groan went up from the circle of soldiers. It closed in—bewildered angry faces.

"Surrender? Without firing a shot! Shameful!"

"They keep us here nine months doing nothing, and now there's a chance to fight, they won't let us."

The Lieutenant fumbled for words.

"Orders are orders. It's to prevent useless loss of life. We can't hold up the German army with a machine-

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gun and a handful of reserves—" ("We're five hundred thousand in Brittany, and what about Brest?" a voice shouted.) "Besides," he concluded heavily, "France is beaten."

At that, one of the gunners spoke up; it was little Cornec. I can see him still, in his patched blue uniform and wooden sabots, smudging away his tears with an angry fist.

"*Mon Lieutenant*, you mustn't say we're beaten. France can't be beaten like that. I was at Verdun. We've been betrayed."

All about him voices took up the words.

"It's true—it's true. We're not beaten. We've been betrayed!"

The Lieutenant nodded, his lips compressed in a hard line.

"Yes," he said savagely, "and we know by whom!" He turned to the Sergeant. "Have the men carry their arms and munitions to the *mairie*, before five o'clock. After that—every man for himself. Those of you who can, try to make your homes while there is still time. And remember, time is short. The Germans are at St. Brieuc; they will be here tomorrow."

The Parisian stepped forward.

"I can't go home. I wouldn't if I could. I want to fight. Who's with me to make a dash for England? We'll take one of the launches—"

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Then the Lieutenant did an amazing thing.

"Order!" he shouted. "You stay on this island with me. Any man who attempts to desert to England, I'll shoot down like a dog. Understand? The British are to blame for this!"

An hour later, the house-that-Alain-built was empty. Helmets, overcoats, odds and ends of uniforms lay in tumbled heaps on the floor among the cots. No sentry's bayonet gleamed above my garden wall. The machine-gun "nest" with its sod-covered walls was an eyeless socket; the gun had gone. In Cécile's half-turned field, the pole with Gonidec's "target," the toy airplane, lay like a fallen weather vane or a votive offering to an indifferent god. . . .

But the radio still sent off appeals from the High Command. "The armistice is not yet signed. All the armies of land, sea and air must continue stubborn, unflagging resistance."

Empty words. Six hours before, the garrisoned troops from Brest to Nantes had received orders to lay down their arms. . . .

At sunset, Amélie trundled her barrow home from the village. She was herself again, and bursting with news. The Germans had embarked on sailing ships and lay below the north horizon waiting for nightfall to

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invade the island! The painter's wife, who came with her, begged us excitedly to spend the night sitting up together. "You can talk to them," she urged. "You must say we're all non-combatants. We have never done anything against them. My husband knows a lot about their art. He says they have some very good painters."

For one crazy moment, I actually pictured the scene, as in a movie: thundering knocks on the door and soldiers bursting across the threshold, a gun in either hand. . . . Then Marie-Anaik remarked dryly that the Germans had no need of ships or surprise attacks. They could keep on advancing along the highroad on the mainland, like tourists. What was there to stop them?

Yet she agreed with Amélie it might be a good thing to dispose of "valuables." Amélie said everyone in the village who owned silver had buried it. She had no silver to worry about, but there were two big cupboards full of linen. You couldn't put linen into the ground.

"What's the matter with the haystack?" Marie-Anaik suggested.

Alain LeBras, who had gone with our soldiers to the port, brought back word that the mayor had called in firearms and other dangerous weapons and had warned

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civilians against "hostile demonstrations." That sent the painter's wife off again.

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu*, there are sure to be people mad enough to try something. If you hear of anyone plotting, it's your duty to report them. We have to consider ourselves. Think of the reprisals—"

As for "dangerous weapons," she was sure everyone had an old pistol or a gun somewhere in the attic. We must turn them in, even if they were all rust. The Germans would not stop at that, when they searched our houses.

Alain Lebras said the only arm in his house was an air-gun that belonged to Yves. He used to pop at the blackbirds and cats in the garden. Was that a dangerous weapon?

"It could put out an eye," Amélie said thoughtfully. She hoped the Colonel would have sense enough to take down the "panoply" from his wall—swords and spears and nasty curved knives; they were native things and probably poisoned.

"Yes, and why not the meat-chopper and the carving knife and the saw and my mallet for pegging down the cows?" Marie-Anaik got up abruptly from her seat and marched into the garden.

"I just couldn't hear any more," she said as I caught up with her. "How many people do you suppose there are like that in France?"

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We walked on in silence down the lane that curved above the inlet. The water glowed in the gray light, faintly pink, dotted with its thousand rocks. Out in the Narrows, a belated sailboat, becalmed in mid-channel, lay waiting for the current of the mounting tide to take it home.

"I've been wondering all day how Yves is taking it. It's going to be hard on the young." A thought struck her, terrifying. She clutched my arm. "Our ships—do you think we'll have to give them our ships?"

The sailboat in the Narrows was trying to start its engine. Its irregular thump-thump—thump struck like ax-blows on the stillness. Thump-thump—thump. The sounds ceased, but from the dark mainland came another throbbing, like a far echo. It swelled and mounted, grew from a throb to a pounding roar, shook the whole sky like thousands of heavy carts thudding over stony roads. We strained our eyes through the twilight. The planes were over us, but so high we could not see them.

Glancing back, we saw two figures run from Marie-Anaik's gate to the hillock. They stood there looking up, silhouetted against the sky. Amélie and the painter's wife.

"Look at them." Marie-Anaik's voice was bitter. "They've got over being scared, now that the bombs

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aren't for us. Though it's now, every time we hear those things go racketing overhead on their way to bomb the English in their beds—it's now the rest of us will be wanting to hide . . . for shame."

Her voice dropped so low, I barely caught the end.

## 10. Boots on the Heather

AT NINE O'CLOCK the next morning, the first Germans reached the port across the Narrows. Friends who live in the center of town heard the thud of motors and saw three motorcycles bound into the empty square. Three motorcycles with three men in dusty green uniforms, only their noses and chins showing under the heavy dishpan helmets. On the handlebars of one of the cycles was tied a bunch of roses.

The machines drew up in the middle of the square, the soldiers pushed back their helmets and cast curious glances at the granite housefronts and shuttered windows, then one of the three swung his legs off the cycle, clumped across the cobbles to a café and banged his fist on the closed door. It opened cautiously, the soldier lifted his thumb to his lips—an international gesture. "*Bier*," he said, and disappeared within doors.

A few minutes later a side-car carrying an officer joined the soldiers in the square. After a brief halt it wheeled and shot off again in the direction of the town

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hall. Four motorcycles, five men in uniform—the town was "occupied."

It was fully an hour later before other uniforms reached the port. This time it was serious. Four tanks rattled and roared through the main street. Without stopping, they swung into the road towards Brest. Then followed the long procession of covered trucks—mastodons caked with dust, closed tight, but beneath the flapping curtain at the rear one caught glimpses of more green uniforms and the glint of metal. No bunches of roses here, but tied to each headlight, a French soldier's helmet and a sailor's beret with the red pompon. War blossoms. It was no chance fantasy on the part of a single driver. Every truck bore the same decoration.

Only a little thing, but it left its mark. If the invaders hoped to win over the French, they made a mistake there at the outset, with those dangling trophies, flaunted like scalp-locks. To the average Frenchman, mockery is more unforgivable than a massacre.

Few on the island, with the possible exception of the painter's wife, really expected to be massacred, but none the less we anticipated something pretty grim. We knew what had happened to civilians in the north and refugees on the road. As it turned out, nothing took place as we anticipated.

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Instead of the troops we had steeled ourselves to encounter, we were "occupied" by a poster. Those who had summoned enough courage to venture outside their dooryards and walk to the village for news, found it pasted up by the town hall, where it covered the entire billboard. It was a distinctly German poster, with a broad red border and staring black lettering.

### *BEKANNTMACHUNG!*

The groups that had gathered, eyed it with resentful curiosity. To them, it was purely decorative, a symbol that the island was "occupied." Anne-Elise in a circle of younger girls tried to spell out some of the gothic characters; I heard Séverin explaining to a bearded crony that the lingo the Boches talked was as crazy as their print. You could not understand a word. Alain asked the Mayor what the poster said. The Mayor could not tell him. "It's a proclamation in German, just a—proclamation," he said vaguely.

The Mayor was right. And as a proclamation it had no direct significance for the island. It stated that all arrangements for quarters, fodder and supplies should be made "through the proper authorities," not by individuals. "I thought it must be something like that," the Mayor said when I translated. "I guess it's one of the things they brought along with them. When they

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begin giving orders that count, they'll do it in French."

Again, the Mayor was right. That afternoon two gendarmes brought a second notice from the mainland. In French, this time, with the ink still damp. No red border and no staring black characters. Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. "The population is warned against . . ." "must turn over to . . ." "must remain indoors after . . ." "must refrain from . . ." "must offer no help of any sort to . . ." "must treat every representative of the German military forces with . . ."

Signed: *Befehlshaber* for Brittany  
*Kommandantur*: St. Brieuc.

No comments this time in the groups that stood reading. Where had I sensed before that same sultry silence? In Berlin, in the spring of 1936—the docile crowds on their way to the voting booths, and a Nazi voice, sneeringly cynical, remarking: "What do *we* care if a minority—or a majority—is against us? Providing they march!"

The gendarmes who brought the notice wore armistice armbands on their left sleeves. White mourning. Launches and sailboats in the port flew the white armistice flag at the tip of the mast, or at the stern. Beneath it, the French flag hung halfway up the staff, like Etienne's tricolor—now everywhere at half-mast.

In the shade of a plane tree, a gendarme and the

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owner of one of the villas in the south conversed in undertones.

" . . . no intention of handing them over," the latter was saying.

"Of course, *Monsieur l'Avocat*. Be sure to grease them well and wrap them up in oil-cloth . . ."

As I crossed the village square, someone fell into step with me. It took me a second look to recognize the Parisian, dressed in what he told me was one of Yves's shirts, a pair of Alain's work trousers, and canvas sandals that from their looks might have been brought in by the tide.

"Yes, I'm still here—thanks to the Lieutenant. Kept me at his heels all last night. Now he's gone off to—  
to surrender, the —!" He spat it out, a word of three letters, devastating. "I'm all the army that's left."

"And the others—"

"Streaking it for home. Back to the cows. A lot they care. But I needn't talk; I'm here too."

I asked him what he planned to do.

"Stick around and see what happens. Marie-Anaik won't let me starve. If the Boches don't get their hands on me, maybe one of these days I can get Séverin to take me—fishing."

Back at the farm, I found Amélie lecturing 'Guitte's two little boys.

"Now remember when you see them, you're not to

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say ‘Boches’! If you do, they’ll put you in prison and shoot your mama and your grandma—”

“Shoot them dead?” Auguste junior asked with interest.

“Yes, and they’ll shoot you too—pom, pom.” She aimed a bony finger. The younger boy let out a howl that brought ’Guitte hurrying out of doors. She spoke her mind to Amélie about scaring little children.

Amélie snapped back: she might be thankful to her for scaring them the day the Bo—the Germans, came.

Were they, or were they not coming to the island? And when? Everybody wondered and no one, not even the Mayor, knew the answer. Alain guessed the Germans were scared the British might come and trap them. Séverin said the island was too near the coast to interest the British and too far from the mainland “for comfort,” so far as the Germans were concerned.

Each day, however, brought a new rumor, and every hamlet on the mainland received its quota of troops. We heard they had set up batteries on the wooded points across the Narrows—none came to us. But the first paper marks put in their appearance—one mark, twenty francs. No one wanted them, and the shopkeepers themselves were timid about forcing them on buyers. More notices appeared on the billboard at the *mairie*—regulations for slaughtering cattle “with more regard for cleanliness and humanity.”

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"In order to prevent unnecessary suffering on the part of warm-blooded animals, such animals must be stunned before slaughtering," ran the notice.

"Yes, they're mighty kind to dumb animals," the Parisian sneered. "Do 'em in gently—but do 'em in. Just what they're planning for us."

From the mainland came reports that the Germans were proceeding "gently." It appeared they were "correct" in their contacts with the population, and everything they took they paid for—in marks, to be sure, but the banks had to change them for francs if you insisted. Our grocer's wife, who had gone to the mainland for provisions, told how a German soldier had carried her heavy basket all the way to the pier. Germans had given their seats to women in the bus, one explaining in very creditable French, "We are nice people; you mustn't believe English lies about us." And poor Madame Petit, Annie Prigent's sister—her arm still bandaged from the machine-gun bullet received on the road—had to give up her bag, too, much against her will, and though it was only a little one, to a hulking lad in uniform who told her it had to be so. Such were the "orders."

Orders or no orders, it was far from the treatment we had expected. In that first reaction of relief, I heard people in the village wondering whether the Germans were not perhaps less black than they had been

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painted. Madame la Colonelle who was presiding over the dispensary again, after a few days' eclipse, went so far as to say the time had come to live in peace with the Germans and establish friendly relations. They couldn't be worse than the British who "abandoned France so disgracefully in her hour of need." But the Parisian muttered it would take more than a few bonbons to make him forget what the Germans had done to France.

I had not seen the Colonel since the Armistice, but Alain reported that the old man, who had taken to his bed when the news came, was about again and "hollering"—this time against the British.

"Yes, that's a man's way," Marie-Anaik nodded. "When 'that one' smashes a tool, I'm to blame, or the children. He just can't bear to take the brunt himself."

From what we heard over the radio from Bordeaux, the only French station that still functioned, the new Pétain government was adopting a similar attitude. Its broadcasts filled us with dismay: they sounded like an echo of the German stations. "The British failed to send the promised quota of troops. The British refused to send planes. The British saved their own men at Dunkirk and abandoned ours. The British . . ."

"Maybe it's true and maybe it isn't, but it sounds

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nasty to me," Marie-Anaik said. "They'd do better to keep still."

To our isolation, those broadcasts from Bordeaux were the bleakest things that came to us, during all the bleak days that followed the capitulation. We could accept the news of military defeat—the Line encircled, our troops fleeing south, ever farther south. But this was worse. It struck deeper than the defeat of arms. It was giving up the helve with the ax, the cause with the battlefield. It was equivalent to admitting that since the enemy was stronger, he must necessarily be right.

"You never know how crazy war is, until you're beaten," Marie-Anaik sighed.

The Armistice was signed. A day later, the government at Bordeaux gave out the names of two new members—Pierre Laval, the friend of Mussolini; Adrien Marquet, the "apprentice dictator" and outspoken admirer of Hitler. We remembered then that the aged Marshal was not only the Grand Old Man of Verdun; he had stood for years at the peak of French conservatism, his name a symbol and a slogan for the partisans of a "strong hand," the advocates of authority and hierarchy. Pétain the anti-Republican, Pétain the friend of Franco. "It's Pétain whom we need."

Defeat was swinging the pendulum of French politics far to the Right. Before the eyes of a startled and

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powerless democracy, the Fascist coup d'état so many Frenchmen had dreaded and anticipated for years had taken place overnight, thanks to the might of the German army. It would sweep the Third Republic, its leaders, generals, institutions, its liberty, equality, fraternity into the dustbin. *A bas la troisième République! Vive l'Etat français!*

On June 23, exactly one week after the Armistice was asked for, I saw German soldiers for the first time, and in my own garden. As in August, 1939, war, escorted by the *garde-champêtre*, knocked at the door of *Cœur à l'Ancre*. But this time the uniform was green and the officers who wore it did not come to requisition the house—merely to ask for the key to former Post Number Three. Two blond Aryans, with boots like mirrors, they spoke beautiful French, were stiffly courteous, played with the dog and made polite remarks about the view. They were also particularly anxious to be shown the house of the journalist who was notoriously “unfriendly” to Germans, they said. I gathered from their asides that the journalist had escaped to England.

One of the two, who wore his cap at a dashing angle, kept casting curious glances towards the terrace where Cécile had taken refuge, while he prolonged his play with the dog. (The dog, to our annoyance, mistook the visitors for old friends—she dearly loves a uniform

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—and gave them the enthusiastic welcome she reserves for soldiers.) It took a crisp “*Du bleibst?*” from his companion to drag the German away, but before he left he coolly detached the Briard from her leash. Cécile had tied her up to keep her from playing tag among the dahlias. Without a smile he turned to me.

“You should not keep a big dog on a string, *Madohm*. It spoils her character.” Whereupon he clicked his heels, and with one bow to the door, and a second to the terrace, followed the other officer down the path, the dog capering at his heels.

When they finished poking over the heaps of blankets, coats, helmets and various odds and ends left by the French soldiers in the abandoned Post, the stiffer of the two remarked to the *garde-champêtre*—with considerable justification, I admit—that the place was filthy. While it might be good enough for French soldiers, it would distinctly not do for Germans! After that tactful remark they withdrew, while the *garde* glared and murmured in Breton that he knew of a far filthier place where he’d gladly consign them—he specified where.

Then for another week the island saw no Germans. In the port across the Narrows, wooden-like sentinels stood guard before the *Kommandantur*, the handsomest house in town, belonging to a wealthy ship-owner who had fled to the south. Rows of army trucks lined

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the quays and soldiers in green clumped in and out of the stores, or stood about the doors of pastry shops stuffing down tarts and cakes.

"They clean out the shop in fifteen minutes after each baking," the shopkeeper told me. "I never saw such appetites. Two of them will eat six big tarts between them and a dozen little cakes as well. They act as if they were famished."

Her brother, who owns the big café on the square, said there wasn't a bottle of champagne left in town.

"It's the only wine they know. They lap it up like cider." And in a husky whisper, "They drink it in the morning!" He also said if I wanted gas for my car he knew of a sure way of getting it. "Twenty liters for a bottle of Clicquot—or anything that sparkles. They don't know the difference."

In the rear of his café, I saw two officers tranquilly playing billiards by a table lined with empty beer bottles. They seemed quite at ease, totally oblivious of the row of Frenchmen by the bar who eyed them stonily and exchanged remarks in undertones.

"They look as if they feel at home," I said.

"Yes, they're that, all right. So much so that at four in the afternoon there isn't a place left here for a Frenchman to sit down."

He told me the soldiers had already emptied the shops of perfume, soap, fountain pens, silk stockings

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and silk underwear. All that, they sent to Germany, to their families.

"If they've been deprived for years, as they say, I suppose it's only natural, but still they ought not to take everything we've got. If they keep on, I see hard times ahead. When they've taken the cream, the milk will go too. Did you know they're buying up all the butter? They fix the price at twelve francs a pound, then go to the farmers and offer twenty. Yesterday there wasn't a pound for sale at the market."

On the island, we had no butter either. The merchant who came twice a week from the mainland failed to put in an appearance and local merchants said shipments from Normandy must be held up somewhere. None of them came through. Signs began to appear on the shops: "No butter, no oil, no coffee, no sugar, no soap." And at the tobacco shop, "No tobacco." It was only the beginning.

Though the men in green stayed on the mainland, the male population of the island grew every day. Our men were coming home. Soldiers and sailors, they straggled in one or two at a time, bare-headed and wearing vaguely civilian garb—a sweater, an old coat with their military trousers—whatever they had been able to buy or beg on the way. Most of them traveled down the coast on foot from Lorient and Brest, sleeping in the open, avoiding the main roads. Anna

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Goaster's Pierre, who walked from Brest, said he had been stopped several times by Germans on the road. They asked him who he was, where he was going. "Going home? Don't lose any time getting there," they advised. He added that they generally let the sailors pass, but picked up soldiers whenever they found one.

On a siding at Morlaix, Pierre had seen an entire train filled with French officers guarded by German soldiers. An officer threw him a two franc piece from the window and asked him to buy bread, but the Germans would not let him approach when he brought the loaf. At Brest there had been almost a panic when the news of the Armistice came—20,000 men from the marine barracks stampeding the shops to buy civilian clothes.

"You saw scraps of uniforms strewn all over the place. A *chemisette* and a beret on every cobblestone."

He laughed mirthlessly.

"Shameful, shameful," Marie-Anaik murmured.

"What could we do? The ships had gone; the officers skipped out with their wives. They say one of the heads at the arsenal was a Boche. He turned up in a green uniform the day the Germans came."

The return of the sailors did more than all the rest to demoralize the island. Only a few were reservists; the majority were Navy men in active service, from

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ships demolished off Dunkirk, from coast artillery units, or marine barracks. The Navy was their livelihood, their assured future. What would become of them?

"We'll always need a Navy," Pierre Goaster said confidently.

Eventually—perhaps, providing Britain won. . . . But how could the British win, now they were alone? And even if they did, it might take years. In the meantime?

René Lebras, the tugboat captain, said the British had no right to keep on fighting, now that France was beaten. It was just plain stubbornness on their part, and wouldn't help them or anyone else. They were only prolonging the war—uselessly, for of course they couldn't win. As for him, he had a wife and four children to support. He began worrying about his pay. He returned in a tearing rage from a call at the local marine office. "They say they have no authority to pay me! Well, I'll show them!" The next morning René left for the port across the Narrows and was gone all day. He returned, gleeful, waving a paper.

"What have you there?" his mother asked him.

"An order—from the *Kommandantur*."

Marie-Anaik's hand dropped.

"René—you didn't . . . ?"

"Of course I did. The Germans were polite, too, not

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like the crabs at the marine office. I guess this will make them sit up." He avoided his mother's eye.

"I dare say it will." Marie-Anaik's look was withering. "René Lebras, I'd have kept you here, you and yours, and even your mother-in-law, the rest of your lives—rather than see you do this. I don't know my own son." Then firmly, "I'm not going to turn you out of doors because of the children, however much I'd like to, but I think now you'd better begin planning to take them home."

Whether the German order did or did not make the marine bureau "sit up," we never learned. In any case, no pay was forthcoming. The bureau had no funds. So all René's "creeping and crawling" got him nowhere. . . .

From what we heard, others besides René had established relations of a sort with the Germans on the mainland. A notice appeared at the *mairie* stating the military authorities would pay no attention whatsoever to "anonymous communications." A refugee from Rennes who called at the *Kommandantur* for permission to return home in his car, brought back a curious story. The captain in charge had offered to shake hands with him on leaving. The refugee bowed stiffly and declined the honor.

"I have two sons in the Army, sir, both missing

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since May. Were I younger, I should have taken up arms with them. It is my one regret."

The officer's hand flew to his cap. His heels clicked.  
"I salute you, *Monsieur*. At last I meet a true Frenchman."

One night Alain brought home the news that our neighbor on the point whom no one had seen for months, had returned to the island. The "Gangular's" house was open; what was more, Alain had seen the "Gangular" himself walking through the village with two German officers, "just as easy as if they were old friends."

Perhaps they were, I thought, remembering the journalist's visit. But where was the journalist now? A refugee in England. Etienne, that other staunch champion of the Republic, was dead in her defense. "The ones on top—all for Hitler and the Fascists; the men, more interested in money than they are in the Republic." Etienne's Republic was crumbling. Our neighbor on the point and René—they were left.

A voice spoke from the end of the table.

"They've stabbed the Republic in the back, with the help of the Germans. The very ones who used to claim we'd make use of the war to bring in the Russians and set up a Soviet. All the time they were planning to use it themselves, with Hitler to back them."

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The Parisian, who was eating supper with the family, brought down his fist on the table and cursed the Bordeaux "apeasers" and the government elected by the people that had betrayed the people's trust.

"So far as I can see, that's what always happens to the people. We're not smart enough," Marie-Anaik said wearily.

"But it's not going to last. They have us throttled today, thanks to the German guns, but wait till Britain wins—" He broke off. "What are the British saying, anyhow?"

That night we came back to the radio: not to Radio-Paris, that had found authentic French voices for its all-too-German broadcasts; nor yet to Radio-Bordeaux with its diatribes at "our former Allies" and its doleful emphasis on "merited punishment" and "expiation." As in the early days of June, we tuned in on London.

A French voice—and young. The first young voice we had heard in weeks spoke to us through the night.

"This is London. . . . Liberty, equality, fraternity. . . . Here speaks Free France!"

*La France libre*—It was as if the France we loved had taken refuge across the Channel.

The Parisian fumed. "Why can't I swim across?"

"If Etienne were alive, he'd take you," Marie-

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Anaik told him. Whereupon Etienne's widow spoke from the doorway where she stood listening.

"Etienne's boat is still here."

On the third of July, we were "occupied." Four hundred soldiers moved over to the island. A commission had come the day before, leaving sundry chalk marks on the doors of houses near the port and in the village: one officer, fifteen men; two officers, thirty men. All the hotels received their quota; the office of one of them became the *Kommandantur* for the island. Beds, mattresses and sheets (Sheets for soldiers! Did they have sheets in German barracks?) were requisitioned in empty villas. The troops were billeted on the townspeople, not in the posts French soldiers had occupied. Did the Germans consider them too "filthy" or was there another reason?

We already knew they had left French barracks on the mainland standing empty. The green troops occupied schools and private houses. No Hackenkreuz flew from the staff they had set up in the dooryard of the *Kommandantur*. After the first day they hauled it down—a wise precaution against eventual British bombs. On the island the men in green were given quarters within five hundred yards of the port.

"They're scared of getting caught away from their boats," Séverin chuckled. "They must expect the Eng-

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lish to come over any minute. Well, maybe they will."

From the heights above the port, we watched the arrival of the troops. Launches towed strange-looking craft, the famous rubber boats: elliptical rubber rings like mammoth sausages, two to three feet thick, inflated and stuffed with kapok. They had cleated floors and were big enough to hold from thirty to forty men. In spite of their size, they looked like playthings for bathers. The launches brought long strings of them, bobbing over the waves like the jointed tail of some monstrous sea serpent, while the islanders looked on with skeptical grins. Did the Germans really expect to navigate the Channel with craft of that sort? Séverin said he'd like to see them try it.

"In those things they'll be in the water as much as out of it. And if they run into a good nor'wester it will blow 'em back to Bochie—or to Kingdom Come."

The launches also towed rafts loaded with camp kitchens, army wagons and bunchy somethings hidden by tarpaulins, that we took for guns. Horses too, held by uneasy-looking lads. For the first time, the island was to be treated to the spectacle of men on horseback. We watched the rafts and the strings of boats struggle with the tidal current that drove them far into the Narrows and swung them dangerously about the rocks. It took an entire afternoon to trans-

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port men and equipment across five miles of water—and they drowned two horses.

"Fresh-water sailors," Séverin grunted. "At that rate, it will take them a month to cross to England."

Though the newcomers laughed boisterously as they leaped ashore, some of them looked quite pale. It was clear they were not used to the sea. Alain Lebras, who ventured down to the pier for a closer view, reported amazing questions the men had asked him in pidgin French.

"Where is the Channel? Can you see across? Is England farther than the island? Is the water deep?"

Alain said the men looked anything but happy when he set them right. To be sure they understood him—he yelled "like a bos'n."

"One hundred miles to England. Water enough to drown your whole army. Hope you're good sailors."

While the small boys on the pier, pointing first to the soldiers and then to the sea, giggled, "*Gloo-gloo, Angleterre, gloo-gloo!*" and took to their heels.

Scuff, thump, scuff—The men fell into line at a yelp from the non-com; his strangled bark brought back memories of my last trip north of the Rhine in 1936. It had seemed to me then the official voice of Nazi Germany. And now there were Nazi boots clumping over our island paths—a sound that in my wildest imaginings, I never thought to hear. They

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were beautiful boots, polished and dustless, so heavy they seemed to advance by their own momentum, like pistons, pumping loose-jointed knees in baggy green trousers. Up and down, leather and hobnails tramping the roads of France—from Sedan to the Spanish border. Seven-league boots.

“*Acht’ng! Singen!*” bawled the officer.

The green ranks gave tongue. This was not like the student choruses heard in other days in the Yser valley, or the skiers’ songs about the fire on the Feldberg, to the accompaniment of accordions and ribboned guitars. There was rhythm, measure, timed to the pounding boots; all the structure was there, but the harmony had gone. As Alain remarked, cocking his head with a puzzled grin, “That isn’t singing—it’s hollering.”

A few yards from where we stood, the path the men were following reached the crest of the hill above the port. From behind a clump of trees on our left came the Colonel, in his blue suit with the military collar, the left breast barred with a row of colored ribbons. Where the path reached the top of the hill, he stopped and stood watching the mounting figures. They came on, two by two, filling the path from rim to rim, the officer in the lead.

Fifty feet above them the Colonel held his ground, erect in the path, his hands resting on his cane. The

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boots pounded nearer. Only a few yards more, then the officer barked, the green ranks split to left and right, two parallel files streamed on like currents about a rock.

*Wach'—und—treu-yeh  
Macht—und—Stahl*

As he passed, the officer jerked his hand to his cap. The Colonel's hand rose automatically in reply.

In our group, delighted grins greeted the incident. "The old man has guts," Séverin approved.

Wheeling about in the path, the Colonel looked after the receding soldiers. His glance took in the neat uniforms, the knapsacks with their square of hairy red cowhide, the polished boots and gleaming rifles.

He stroked his beard reflectively.

"They're a fine body of men," he said, as I joined him on the path.

No soldiers came to the north, even though the only strategic points on the island—the Semaphore and the lighthouse—were located there. The light no longer functioned, the Semaphore and Post Number Three stayed empty. The afternoon of the day the Germans came, the Parisian asked Cécile whether she would like to have him take up the spading of her meadow.

"It's not my job, but I have to earn my keep if I stay here. I guess it will be some time before I get a

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chance to take up a needle again. Just now, I'd rather handle a gun."

But Cécile's garden was destined to remain unfinished. The Germans were scouring the country for French soldiers, Alain reported the following morning when he returned from the village. They had taken convalescents from the hospitals and men on sick leave from their homes, and were shipping them off to prison camps. They had even brought prisoners to the island, crowding them into the former French Post in the village—thirty white men and ten Senegalese. They were going to set them to work leveling a rifle range on the east shore.

"Prisoners in their own country and working for the Boches. If I were a man, I'd die of shame," Amélie sniffed.

"We'll have something to be ashamed of, if we let them die of hunger," Marie-Anaik retorted. She lost no time stirring up a huge kettle of rice and milk and ordered Alain to "twist the necks of those two young cocks that haven't found out it's bad luck to crow in the evening."

The Parisian heard the news with an uneasy frown. He left his spade standing in the field and disappeared down the lane in the direction of the inlet. Later Alain told Anne-Elise he found him drinking cider in Alice Bozec's kitchen, "making up to Etienne's widow,"

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he teased. "Sitting on the bench they were, with their heads together and Alice filling his glass as if she couldn't pour him enough. The lad might do worse—a woman with a house and a good pension and a tongue no sharper than some."

For once, Anne-Elise seemed at loss for a retort. She raised her eyes from the army sock she was darning, to look appealingly at her mother, who told Alain tartly to drop his foolishness or take his gossip to Amélie if he wanted a listener.

An hour or so afterwards, I saw the Parisian coming up the path from the inlet, deep in conversation with Pierre Goaster, the light-keeper's son. A few minutes later, he was in Marie-Anaik's garden, seated on the well curb, where Anne-Elise was washing salad—that is to say, she had evidently come there to wash salad. The basin of water and the wire basket of salad leaves stood on the stone ledge, but neither Anne-Elise nor the Parisian seemed aware of them, when I stepped into the garden and took them by surprise. Before I could beat a noiseless retreat, Anne-Elise caught sight of me. She broke away with a little cry, and ran past me into the house, her cheeks scarlet. The Parisian remained on the well curb, swinging his legs.

He picked up his half-smoked cigarette from the stone and relighted it with elaborate composure

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"I've changed my mind about this country. When the war is over, I'm coming back here for good. Maybe you'll let me cover another chair for you, then, though *she says*"—with a nod towards the house—"sewing isn't a man's job."

I noticed he wore a pair of navy blue trousers and stout black shoes, shiny with polish. A blue jacket stripped of its insignia lay beside him. The Parisian met my look with a grin.

"I've gone over to the Navy." Then his face grew sober. "The women on this island—I've never seen their like. They can't do enough. That poor lady down by the inlet—it's her man's clothes she's given me." Unconsciously his voice took on the Breton intonation. "I didn't know there were such women in France. They ought to be generals."

He gripped my hand when I left.

"You've been good to me too, Madame." He did not say so, but I understood it was a farewell.

At sunset the breeze from the southwest that had blown gently all day, freshened as the tide ran out.

"A good sailing breeze, and the wind's in the right quarter," Alice Bozec called to us as she passed with her cows.

"But can he sail a boat?" Cécile asked her.

"Who? Anna Goaster's Pierre? All the way to

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America if he has to. But I guess it won't be that far."

That night was moonless. When morning came, I hurried up the attic stairs to the window that looks out on the inlet. Etienne's boat was gone.

## II. Men in Green

IT SEEMS inconceivable, when I look back on it, that the presence of four hundred Germans on our little island should have changed so little its aspect or its habits. But that has always been characteristic of the island; it has a curious way of concealing its population. It may be due to the walled gardens, or the countless tiny inlets and capes that add miles to its circumference, or perhaps the island habit of staying at home inside a walled garden is responsible. In ordinary times, you can walk from north to south without meeting a dozen people, and except on market days, ten shoppers in the village is a crowd.

Though the invasion almost doubled our population, the phenomenon still applied. Except at meal-times, or when they drilled on the square, even the village saw few Germans, aside from the men on duty at the *Kommandantur*, and the cooks at the camp kitchen. They were always somewhere else—practic-

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ing on the rifle range, swimming at the beach in the south, or "attacking" the west shore as a preface to the attack on Britain. At our end of the island, they were all but invisible. We might almost have forgotten their presence, had it not been for the patrols that clumped past twice during the nights, and occasional promenaders on the rocks over by the sea, or grouped on the hillock by the lighthouse where we had heard them admiring the view.

When the Germans first came, the mere sight of a green uniform sent people scurrying into their gardens as if the pest were abroad on the moor. Sabots clattered down the lane, gates slammed, bolts shot into their sockets. When trapped too far from the home fortress to take refuge there, the native would bury his nose in the potato or cabbage patch and set up a dust cloud with his hoe, as effective as any smoke screen. Poor Pauline Legall, who lived within a stone's throw of the rifle range, led a prison existence behind shuttered windows and locked doors. When she ventured out to gather beans in the strip of garden beyond her wall, she took her dog with her, attached by a leash to her apron band. She tried to persuade Marie-Télégramme to share the siege. Marie-Télégramme declined, though she no longer had "officials" to deliver, and it was lonely sitting nights at home. If she had to choose, she said, she would take the Germans; even

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they were preferable to sharing a house with Pauline Legall.

Amélie, like the others, shut herself in behind barred doors when a German was signaled in the neighborhood, but we concluded she must have loopholes in the walls. "That fellow with the bandaged hand went by twice yesterday," she would say. Or suspiciously—"The one with no hair and spectacles followed down the path not five minutes after you and Madame Cécile started for Pors-a-pren to bathe. It's not the first time I've seen him do that."

Amélie had personal grounds for detesting the Germans. They had robbed her of her "tourists." Since Brittany was occupied as well as Paris, there was no point in staying on to be bombed by the British, the painter told Amélie. The day the first British scout planes appeared over the island, he and his wife, together with many "voluntary refugees," left for home.

In the village, people affirmed that the men in green were making efforts to be as unobnoxious as possible. Some had even been known to buy butter at their own canteen for the family in whose house they were quartered. Children said the soldiers were always giving them candy. It appeared they had orders to establish "friendly contacts" with the Bretons. They made use of a method that was directness itself. Village folk told us the soldiers walked into their houses

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with the aplomb of expected guests, sat down without being asked and stayed until they felt like leaving. As the "host" spoke no German, they carried on conversations among themselves, or improved their French vocabulary by pointing at objects and demanding the French word for them. They were disconcertingly at home. The butcher's wife related how four soldiers filed into her kitchen while the family sat at supper, with no apparent object except to sit in a row along the wall and watch the family eat. Then they filed out again.

The few soldiers who spoke French said they were delighted with Brittany. It amazed them to see people, common ordinary people, living so well; living indeed "*wie Gott in Frankreich*" in a land of butter and cheese and sausage and whipped cream. *Schlagsahne*, the first they had tasted in years. And wine—champagne, that only the rich could drink in the country they came from. They marveled at the shops, stocked with food and things to wear, all marvelously cheap for a soldier with two reichmarks—forty francs—a day to spend (eighty times as much as the average French private was paid). They needed no orders to be polite to the native population. They beamed on the sullen Bretons, were ready to kiss every girl and drink brotherhood with every Frenchman.

None the less, their friendly advances brought few

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if any results. That was to be expected. So many island men were still away. No one knew what had become of them, whether they were at sea, whether they were prisoners, or worse. The women relaxed not an iota their stony-eyed hostility. Whatever friendly overtures the invaders might make, they were still the invaders. They had no right to be there.

I might never have made closer acquaintance with Hitler's army, or become one of the rare points of contact between two parallel and hostile worlds, if it had not been for the cat.

'Titchat the cat was a half-grown animal of mixed parentage that I had inherited from the horizon-blue neighbors at Post Number Three. Perhaps her early acquaintance with soldiers made her partial to uniforms, perhaps she was merely curious by nature. She used to spend her days on the garden wall, watching what went on in the lane. Whenever a German passed, she would arch her back, cock her head on one side and reach down a playful paw, making advances that were invariably successful. From time to time we overheard comments in the lane about the *schönes Ding* and the *niedliches Tier*.

One day, boots scraped on the stones and a hand in a green sleeve reached up above the wall. The cat gave a surprised squall, wriggled free and leaped down out of sight. Not long after, Alain Lebras called to me

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from the gate. There was a Boche at the farm; no one could understand his talk; would I mind coming over and translating? It appeared the soldier had followed the cat into the court where Alain was splitting driftwood for the fire. The German gave up the chase straightway. Stripping off his coat, he took the ax from Alain's hands and fell to work on the wood pile.

Now Brittany hospitality is no empty word. When a stranger chops wood for you on a hot July day, be he enemy or friend, he deserves a glass of cider. Alain led the man into the kitchen, filled a bottle from the barrel and set out a couple of glasses. As he understood not a word of the guest's conversation, he came across the lane for reinforcements. So that was how I made my first real contact with the Army of Occupation—in the person of one Emil Heiter, private soldier in the —th Engineers, he too a peasant, from the hills near Munich.

He stood by the kitchen table, a glass in his hand, facing Marie-Anaik, who eyed him as she might have eyed a savage from the bush or a man from Mars—her face alive with humorous incredulity and distrust. A German in her kitchen! Anne-Elise had taken refuge in the darkest corner by the chimney.

There was nothing striking in the visitor's appearance, or even specifically Aryan—he was undersized and stringy-haired, with no outstanding trait of color

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or feature. He was "just ordinary," Marie-Anaik said afterwards; it was only the fact of his being there that upset her. He might even have passed for a Frenchman except there was something queer about his mouth—she guessed it was too big.

The soldier had a pleasant smile, but a hard glint showed now and then in his eyes. I noticed it several times during our conversation, which at first was less a conversation than an interrogatory. He was surprised and overjoyed to find someone who spoke his language, but—

"How do you happen to speak German? Where did you learn it? Have you ever been in Germany? When? What are you doing here in this far corner of Brittany? Don't Americans speak the same language as the British?"

And where was my French husband and what was his attitude towards Germany? Did he think "in the French way" or was he influenced by British lies?

I said shortly that I possessed no more information about my husband than he did. That he was on the sea and I had received no news of him since May.

At that, the hardness went out of the soldier's eyes and he remarked with a rueful laugh that he was worse off than I. He had not seen his own wife and boys for nearly a year—and he had been fighting all the time, in Poland, in Norway, and just now in France. The

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change in the man was so sudden it was bewildering. In a breath, he went on telling me what a terrible thing war was: he had been through hell in Poland, had lost all but thirty out of 140 comrades on the Aisne, had almost gone crazy sitting in the icy mud of the Siegfried Line last winter, and if the war dragged on a second winter anything might happen, even a revolution. I made no comment at all to that. After the quizzing I had just been through, it sounded like provocation. I had yet to learn—what I discovered later—that in each German soldier there are two distinct persons: the man—a man like everyone, with wife and children and spontaneous reactions—and in addition, the Nazi, who recites a lesson. (You could almost hear the quotation marks.) The two are rarely in harmony, nearly always in flagrant opposition, and what is still more startling, neither the “man” nor the “Nazi” seems aware of the contradiction. I made the observation over and over again.

An example, by way of illustration.

“You seem to be great friends with the Italians,” I said on one occasion. (I may add that I learned to avoid direct questions, for when I did, the Nazi bobbed up inevitably with an evasive reply.)

“You think we are friends? Oh, Hitler and Mussolini—yes, to be sure, they are old comrades. But as for the people—I have known Italians. They are all alike,

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in for themselves and what they can get out of it. Look at the way they came into the war. They've got something of the Jew and the Nigger in their makeup. But," (this with dignity), "of course I won't say anything against the Italians because they are our allies!"

Altogether that first meeting with the man in green left an uncomfortable impression. When I repeated the conversation to Cécile, she wondered as I did—might not the German be a creature of the Gestapo and the cat incident merely a pretext to make contacts with the population on our north shore? Or was not every German soldier, by definition, a potential spy and informer?

"Don't you think you ought to go over your books again?" Cécile suggested.

I had already combed the bookshelves, weeding out "subversive" titles. However, I went through the rows again. (I may add here that I could have spared myself the trouble. None of the soldiers who came to the house even so much as glanced at a bookshelf.) This time I discovered George Grosz's *Gesicht der herrschenden Klasse*. Would that be considered as taboo? It was a German edition, to be sure. It came over me then that nearly all the books were in English. That in itself ought to damn me. However, I had no intention of burning all the books in our library. I was

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hesitating over Strachey's analysis of Fascism when we heard the latch of the garden gate click and the sound of boots on the gravel. I tucked the book behind the others and hurried to the door. It was Emil Heiter again, this time all smiles and cordiality. He greeted me like an old friend.

"I hope I'm not disturbing *gnä Frau*, but—" He fumbled in the deep pocket of his baggy trousers and drew out a quart bottle filled with yellow liquid. "They tell me you are short of oil on the island. One of my comrades picked this up. He thought it was white wine. It is of no use to us—perhaps you would like it."

Oil—it was the first we had seen in weeks. And a whole liter!

"Where did your comrade buy it?"

"He didn't buy it." Another broad grin. "*Er hat's organisiert.*" (He organized it.) *Organisieren*—to expropriate. That I learned was the meaning of the word in soldier slang. So it was loot he offered us, taken no doubt from one of the vacant villas. He noticed my hesitation.

"It did no good where it was. The people it belonged to are in Paris. Rich people who live a lot better than you. They have two houses—nobody has a right to two houses. Some of the empty villas here have cellars full of wine. And the rest of you haven't

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a drop. (It was true.) Do you think that is right?"

I had heard the soldiers were emptying the cellars of unoccupied houses. It was the first sort of looting that occurred on the island. Caretakers had complained to the *Kommandantur* with no effect. I had not heard, however, that any wine had been distributed among the population. Could we accept that bottle of oil?

Cécile, who stood at my elbow, nudged me with a laugh.

"What does he expect in exchange?"

"Heaven knows—payment in kind, perhaps."

"*Pour l'amour du ciel*, give him back his oil!"

The soldier eyed us uneasily. What was it we had just said? I told him it was something I could not translate. His eyes grew thoughtful.

"Ach, I think I understand, *Madobm*. You are two ladies living alone. I am a soldier. There must be no misunderstanding." He drew himself up—and ponderously, "On my honor as a soldier, I do not come—for that."

That remark sent Cécile into another gale of laughter.

"He means well, no doubt, but—can you imagine any Frenchman saying such a thing—or meaning it if he did?"

Marie-Anaik, who had joined us, said dryly she would not put it beyond the German—he had a sol-

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dier's eye. But she saw no reason for refusing the bottle of oil. It was French oil, anyhow, and well—it was just so much the Prussians wouldn't get. She carried off her share without a qualm and managed tactfully to take the donor with her, offering him a glass of cider in the kitchen.

But we had not finished with our visitor. That same afternoon, Cécile ran to me in the back garden where I was watching Alain Lebras clip and tie the tomato plants.

"He's here again. Walked into the house as if we expected him, and sits there beaming!" Her voice shook with indignation.

"Well, if we will eat oil on our salad—"

"You can have the rest of it. I'll not touch another drop," Cécile said crossly.

Too late, I thought, as I hurried back to the house.

The soldier sat in the Captain's chair by the north window, a hand on either knee, as if he were sitting for his portrait. Freshly shaven, his boots dusky with polish. On the window seat lay his cap and belt, its buckle still inscribed with the words, "*Gott mit Uns,*" which he told us later was a "paradox." "Only the old folks who don't know any better still have faith in superstitions of that sort."

That afternoon, conversation balked. As Cécile said,

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there was something unpleasantly illicit about this entertaining of the enemy.

"Why don't you tell him you prefer his gifts to his company?"

"Yes, why don't I?" That wretched pint of oil—it had taken on the proportions of the Heidelberg *Fass*.

Our visitor seemed quite unaware of any coolness in his welcome. He continued beaming for an hour or so and left promising to return. In the meantime he had spoken of his enthusiasm for France. It was a backward country, to be sure, and degenerate like all democracies. However, with Germany's help he thought something could be made of it. It was such a rich land, he said enviously, but so dirty.

"If your house was like some of the ones I've seen, I wouldn't be here." (Cécile suggested that for the future we receive our guests in former Post Number Three.)

He admitted he had called earlier in the day to take soundings, so to speak.

"Of course, if this were Germany you'd have a tile-stove instead of that old stone chimney; those beams in the ceiling would be plastered over and papered and you wouldn't keep so much old furniture. But of course," magnanimously, "I can see this is only a country house."

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That was almost too much for Cécile.

"Would you mind asking the tactful person in green how long he and his friends expect to remain in France?"

I translated.

"Ten years or so. That's what the officers say. And naturally we intend to keep Paris."

When he left, Cécile sank weakly into a chair.

"Do you imagine they're all like that?"

I reminded her we had been interviewing one of the humbler parts of Hitler's war machine—a simple soldier, a peasant.

"But I've lived all my life with peasants. And you had peasant soldiers next door all winter. Can you imagine Gonidec, or Hervé, or even Firmin—"

"*Que voulez-vous?* He's the conqueror," Marie-Anaik said grimly. She had come to tell us Amélie had waylaid her in the lane, fairly bursting with curiosity. What could it mean—a German had been twice in the same afternoon to the Captain's house!

"I had to lie to her. I said he came to inspect the Post. You can't tell the truth about anything to Amélie. And I spoke my mind to Alain for having brought all this about. Not that it does any good now."

"No, now that we're branded." Cécile's laugh rang

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with exasperation. "And there is the mark of our infamy." She pointed to the Captain's chair.

Below the seat, on the front of the neat new cover the Parisian had made, two vertical streaks barred the orange linen—black polish from the soldier's boots.

From that day on, we had frequent callers. Apparently our first visitor had reported that in our corner of the island was a lady who spoke German. I suspect, too, we had been listed somewhere—possibly on the lists of the *Kommandantur*—as "friendly to Germans." The men in green dropped in at all hours, walking into garden and house as if they belonged there. At first on all sorts of pretexts: was there a place to swim on the north shore, a short cut over the rocks to the village, had we butter to sell? At last without the shadow of an excuse. They simply came and stayed.

All were common soldiers, peasants for the most part: Hans the Rheinlander, Eric, Emil and Wolfgang from the Bavarian hills, and Karl August from the "hunger districts" of East Prussia, struck with amazement at the fertility of our rich black soil. Though Johann Fuchs and Hermann Stotter came from the factories of Frankfort and Düsseldorf; and Helmut Müller, from Berlin. Most of them were so like the blue-uniformed peasants who had been our neighbors

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all winter that it was sometimes startling. And yet there was always a difference. The "Nazi" stood ever in the shadow, like a watchful censor, particularly when two or more soldiers were present. When a soldier came alone, the Nazi withdrew almost completely; when he intruded in the conversation, it sounded like an afterthought.

"Of course I am speaking to you *als Mensch*, as man to man, and I say things I wouldn't say as a soldier. Though if I thought you were hostile to us or to our allies, I'd tap you on the shoulder and say, 'Follow me.' If you tried to betray me I'd say, 'The woman lies.' And I would be believed, not you. A soldier's word is always taken before a civilian's—except when it's a question of rape."

All were eager to talk. After the months of soldiering, they said it was good to be in a family atmosphere and forget the war. They were all in their late twenties and early thirties, with wives and babies at home—babies who had not yet seen their fathers or would not recognize them when they came home. We saw their pictures and heard how hard it was for "*meine Frau*" to keep them fed and clothed. We in France were fussing over food shortages and restrictions—it had been like that in Germany for years.

"*Meine Frau*, like all the women, wears wooden-soled shoes," Johann Fuchs told us. "They go clop,

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clop, clop in the streets. I've sent her two pairs of leather ones, with high heels. And little blue ones for the baby. And a little knitted woolly coat. We have no leather or wool, you know, at home, except for soldiers. Our 'wool' looks and feels like the real thing, but it isn't warm. They say it's made out of wood and glass."

Helmut Müller said his wife had asked for silk underwear and powder and rouge. I said I had heard German women were not supposed to use rouge. He nodded with a grin.

"That's the propaganda—but you know how women are. In Berlin, you see lots more elegant women than here in Brittany. I have seen ladies on the Kurfurstendam with their lips and nails painted blue. That is the latest *Pariser Mode*."

Karl August had sent home coffee, five pounds of it, "organized" in an abandoned shop in the north of France. He had not sent it by post—that was too dangerous. There were a lot of new people in the post office who stole half of what passed through their hands. He had given it to a comrade who was going home on leave.

"Maybe he'll take part of it, but at least he'll leave something for my wife."

Helmut Müller had been married for four years, but he had only one child. Was that not exceptional,

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I asked. I thought Germans went in for large families. He laughed good-naturedly.

"That's more propaganda. What good are children when you can't feed them? My wife says she won't have another, not for a long time."

In Helmut's wallet, together with the photographs of his wife and boy, were three or four others—pictures of girl friends, he said.

"Haven't you a good many girl friends for a married man?"

"But soldiers are men," he answered, "and when you are months away from home—though our army is strict. You're not supposed to—well, have relations with any woman who isn't a professional." That was for reasons of hygiene, he assured me. Since France, as everyone knew, was rotten with venereal disease, and the army could keep a careful check on "professionals." But there was also another reason. The girl might have Jewish blood, and you'd be responsible for another Jewish baby. "You've got to think of the Race."

"I suppose you couldn't imagine losing your heart to a Jewish girl?"

The Nazi glint that shot through Helmut's blue eyes when he said "Jew" went out like a candle flame.

"Oh, but I have!" he said ecstatically. "*Liebe*—love doesn't obey laws. Do you know what *Liebe* is? She

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was a fine girl too," he went on dreamily, "but"—and his voice hardened again—"I saw to it that there weren't any children."

The men in green had much to say on the Jewish question. That is, they all said the same thing, quoted verbatim from the Nazi lesson book: the Jews had plotted to dominate the world; they held all the democracies in their grip; they were responsible for the war and all the misery it caused; they were vermin that had to be destroyed.

Karl August said he thought some Jews were decent people just the same. There had been a man in his town, a rich Jew who kept a store. He gave land for a school for backward children, lent horses to break the ground for the foundation and paid for the labor. A nice man, but when Hitler came to power, he had to go. "The good ones have to suffer for the bad."

Whenever we touched on international questions, I heard more quotations.

"The Russo-German pact is only commercial. It can't be anything closer, you see, for we are against Bolshevism."

In general, our conversation steered away from politics. That, I gathered, was forbidden ground; besides, all the necessary thinking on such matters had been done by the author of *Mein Kampf*.

Even talkative Helmut was chary of expressing his

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views before a comrade. That attitude of mutual distrust was characteristic. It looked as if the famous comradeship were purely superficial—a thing commanded and imposed. It seemed as forced as the “spontaneity” of the soldier choruses that rang from one end of the island to the other as the men marched by. I never heard soldiers sing without being ordered.

Yes, there was a curious lack of solidarity among these brothers in arms. One day we saw three soldiers drinking together at the café in the village. One of the three was noisily drunk. He announced to the room that he was going home on leave. “I’m going tomorrow and I’m never coming back. Never, you understand. The *verfluchter* war can go on without me.”

His friends did what they could to calm him. They looked uncomfortable and kept casting uneasy glances toward the other customers, all of them French. At last their companion got to his feet, reeled over to the bar and demanded more cognac. It was refused him, whereupon the soldier fumbled at his belt, dragged out his knife and made threatening passes at the barman’s belly. The other two soldiers sprang up from the table—we expected to see them lay hold of their friend and lead him off to bed. Instead of that, they dashed out the door and returned a few seconds later with an officer. The Frenchmen present were dumbfounded. Give over a comrade to an officer—the

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traditional enemy! Such a thing, they said, could never have happened in the French army.

The close-up view of the invaders, for all its drawbacks, had one distinct advantage. It gave us an excellent chance to observe what happens to a people shut off from all contact with the world, fed with propaganda, and encased in discipline like a straitjacket, that cramped their every gesture and even their thoughts. From the very first, we were struck by the men's lack of curiosity—it was as if their sense of perception had somehow been blunted. An example: their reaction to the living room at *Cœur à l'Ancre*. It contained a number of objects brought by the Captain from various parts of the world—black and white *tapas* from the Wallis Islands, hanging baskets from the Somali coast, a cocoanut grater shaped like a hobby-horse, a lacquered Chinese pillow. Cocoanut-fiber mats from Tadjourah and the Comores lay on the floor. All these things had delighted our neighbors at Post Number Three—they were always asking what this or that object was used for, how it was made, and what the people were like who made it. No German soldier ever so much as noticed anything the room contained; not one of them ever asked a question. When I pointed out a few of the things to Helmut Müller in an attempt to find a subject of conversation, his only reaction was a vague

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"Oh, yes, things made by the savages . . . the inferior races."

By virtue of the Nazi creed, they and they alone were possessed of all truth. Outside their tight little world there could be only a vacuum, or a scrap heap of useless clutter. Anything beyond the charmed circle either did not exist, or existed only to be changed—like the beamed ceiling or the stone fireplace of *Cœur à l'Ancre*.

None of the soldiers we talked with, ever voiced a word of criticism of the Nazi "order," though all admitted life in Germany was "hard." Some said dully, "*Das ist Krieg,*" and let it go at that. Others repeated what they had been told—that the Jews were to blame, and the jealous nations who were afraid to let Germany live and develop. But a few, like Emil Heiter, claimed Hitler's subordinates, too, were at fault. They were "only men," he said. They tied the Führer's hands.

"There ought to be a thousand Führers, and there's only one. He comes, he makes a speech, everyone applauds. Then he goes away again and his underlings run the place."

They spoke of the Führer as the moujiks of pre-revolutionary days spoke of the Czar, and as I had heard Italians in 1933 speak of the Duce.

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"If the Duce only knew—" "If the Führer only knew—"

They all maintained the Führer was a genius. He had no personal life, he liyed for the people like a saint.

"If he had his way, nobody would have a bigger income than a thousand marks a month. Then there would be enough for everyone."

"What keeps him from having his way?" I asked.

"The others, his associates. You see, they won't let him."

And Emil Heiter added with a wink, "Capital is capital."

In their minds the Führer stood alone. The Führer and his People. After the war—oh, after the war things would be better. "The Führer says things will be better."

Marie-Anaik remarked such talk sounded childish to her.

"Pinning their faith to one man—do they think he's God? Ask them what he's done for them up to now beyond taking them from their families and sending them to war. Destroying and killing and making all the rest of the world unhappy—is that the New Order they talk about?"

Marie-Anaik stood by us staunchly during the days when the "invasion" of *Cœur à l'Ancre* was at its

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height. I suspect she neglected many a task at home; whenever she saw a green uniform in the garden, she would hasten across the lane with her knitting to keep us company. Thanks to her, our standing with the neighbors was unimpaired, in spite of our embarrassing callers. She defended us with energy.

"They keep coming and what can she do? She can't throw them out; they are the conquerors."

The neighbors, with the exception of Amélie, sympathized with our predicament. Though as Séverin pointed out, the initial mistake was mine—what a crazy idea to have studied their lingo! He had been to Bochie many a time himself; it had never occurred to him to learn it. Alice Bozec even went so far as to offer her services as chaperone, to relieve Marie-Anaik. But poor Alice overrated her powers of self-restraint.

"I couldn't help it—it just had to come out," she apologized afterwards. When confronted by a man in green—it was Helmut Müller who advanced towards her with extended palm—she backed away, her hands behind her.

"*Jamais!* You killed my man!" Then she darted past the startled soldier and hurried from the garden.

Helmut shook his head with almost tearful sympathy when I explained.

"Poor woman—*Ja, das ist Krieg,*" he sighed.

As soon as the soldiers started rehearsing for the

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invasion of Britain, their visits fell off considerably. Only Emil Heiter still appeared regularly, every other day, promptly at four o'clock. But I noticed he was as often across the lane as in our garden. He had picked up a small vocabulary of French that he practiced assiduously on Marie-Anaik and Alain, not forgetting Anne-Elise. The latter "put up" with his presence to the extent of being almost civil when the German sat in her parents' kitchen. But she cut him dead when she met him in the lane or at the village. "As if I'd let them see me speaking to a Boche!"

One day she came to ask me, "*Doun-quel*, what does *doun-quel* mean?"

"*Doun-quel*? Oh, *dunkel*: dark, darkness, night."

Anne-Elise flushed with anger.

"So that was where he wanted me to go walking! And he a married man with a wife and children! '*Prohmener, prob-mener . . . dans le Dounquel*,'" she mimicked, and swung her fist. "Just let him try again!"

Yet we all owed a debt to Emil Heiter. It was a ludicrous story that began with the day Anne-Elise tried to tell the soldier his visits annoyed her. Why? Well, people were talking. Emil wanted to know who was doing the talking. Amélie, to be sure.

"*Ach so*—the old *Hexe* is jealous? She wants visits too? *Lieber Herr Gott*, she shall have them!"

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That afternoon, three men in green rapped at the gate of Amélie's cottage. When she drew the bolts, they marched into her garden and demanded a drink of water. She brought them water from the well, but they made no move to go away. They stayed one full hour by the clock, seated on the low wall by the bean patch talking among themselves and playing with the cat. Then they marched out again, saluting her very civilly, Amélie admitted with a simper.

Thereafter, when soldiers came to our end of the island, they never failed to stop at Amélie's. If she took refuge at a neighbor's, they hunted her down.

"Where is Amélie? Where is our lovely friend?" They strode across the fields to shake her effusively by the hand. When they met her in the village, they greeted her with enthusiasm and escorted her half the way home, carrying her basket.

"They're pestering the life out of me," she fretted, almost in tears.

She met scant sympathy from the neighbors.

"I guess the Germans know who their friends are," Anne-Elise teased.

Alain plagued her mercilessly.

"Hé, hé, Amélie—a new *amoureux* every day! And at your age!"

Alice Bozec suggested she complain to the *Kommandantur*.

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"But what can I complain of? They're so—so pleasant!"

In time, of course, the baiting lost its zest. But it achieved its purpose. From then on, Amélie's tongue was busy justifying her own relations with the Germans. For once she had met her match.

## 12. Behind the Tanks

MAIL! There was mail at the post office! our first mail since the invasion. Five sacks had come from the mainland, Marie-Télégramme reported. She trotted all the way from the village to tell us, though she had nothing to deliver but the news. It would take the postmistress all day to sort the letters, but if we called at the office— She hastened on, knocking at every gate.

From the Semaphore hill, we saw black bonnets hurrying from everywhere across the fields. They were massed like bees on the steps and before the screened counter of the post office, behind which the postmistress and her two helpers burrowed feverishly through piles of letters.

“Marie-Anaik, here’s one for you!”

“Madame de G——”

“Anne-Elise, you have something—”

Nothing for me? The others edged their way to the

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door, clutching their letters. One of the girls behind the screen thrust a blue envelope through the window.

"A telegram, Madame."

I tore it open, glanced first at the signature. It came from Port Said and was already a month old. Three words, but it told enough. The Captain was safe.

Marie-Anaik beamed up at me from beside the steps.

"Then it's good news for all of us. Yves is at Oran with his submarine. And Madame Cécile's man writes from the south: he's expecting her to join him. What's your letter, Anne-Elise?"

Her daughter thrust the note she was reading hastily into her pocket.

"It's mailed in France, but he's over there, all right," she said, blushing.

The following day, Cécile left us. She was eager to be off before the Germans cut our communications with unoccupied France. A rumor to that effect had circulated persistently for days. She obtained her visa and the permit to buy gas with surprising ease. "Perhaps our entertaining of the enemy had advantages after all," she said, when we saw her off at the pier. "I hate to think of you standing the siege alone, but Marie-Anaik will look out for you, I know, and soon the Captain will be coming home."

Marie-Anaik tucked her arm through mine.

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"Of course I'll take care of her, but if I know the Captain, he won't be coming home."

As we stood on the pier, a launch crowded with soldiers put in clumsily, narrowly missed ramming Cécile's boat and crashed against the landing steps with a tearing sound of splintered wood. As the Germans surged past us, crowding the Bretons to the edge of the pier, and fell into step—thump, scrape, thump, scrape—I realized I did not *want* the Captain to come.

In the village, we found Séverin, his pipe in his fist, squinting through his spectacles at a new proclamation that had just been posted. "The population is warned against receiving or communicating British propaganda in any form: listening to radio broadcasts, reading or distributing leaflets. . . . Any infraction will be severely punished."

"*Ya,*" he growled in Breton. "A paper they post up; an order they give us. They think we'll be wetting our pants for fear of them. *Mal es Doué*—it's their ink they should be saving!"

Marie-Anaik's eyes crinkled.

"They'll be needing an ear at every door, I'm thinking," she said.

From then on, everyone had a new motive for turning on the radio. Listening to London took on the value of a demonstration—it was one way of flouting the Germans. When they first came to the island, we

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had been cautious when and how we listened. We tuned in on London at six-thirty in the morning and at nine at night, avoiding the noon broadcasts when men in green were likely to be on the road. That was when we were still impressed by the Germans. But now that we knew them better, we were less careful. Few spoke French or English, or were capable of recognizing either language when they heard it. Several times I shut off the radio abruptly when soldiers came into the garden and on one occasion, a visitor—it was Helmut Müller—was actually in the living room before I remembered the British broadcast. He did not appear to notice it; perhaps he thought it was French because I let it play on in his presence.

Whenever I met a neighbor on the road, it was always: "Have you heard the news this morning?" We never said "news from London," we merely said "the news." The rest, whether from German stations or from Radio-Vichy, was "propaganda."

Every child on the island knew the bit of doggerel that a mocking voice chanted at the beginning of the French broadcasts from London.

*Radio-Paris ment. . . . Radio-Paris ment. . . .  
Radio-Paris est allemand.*

When the same voice parodied the slogan of the Vichy government, "*Famille, travail, patrie*": "Family, dis-

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persed; work, unobtainable; homeland, humiliated," heads nodded soberly. "Yes, that's how it is."

Only a day after Cécile left for the south, the news of the attack on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir dropped on us like a bombshell. Anne-Elise came flying over the lane to tell us. (Marie-Anaik had dropped in as she used to do in pre-war days, on her way to change the cows.)

"Maman, Maman, they've blown up our fleet at Oran! No, not the Germans—the British!"

The color drained from Marie-Anaik's brown cheeks. She said only one word:

"Yves—"

One after another, the radio stations shot the news over the air: Vichy, Paris, Berlin, London . . .

We argued back and forth. Why did the British do it? Was the French commander at fault? Did Pétain really mean to hand over the fleet to the Germans? Would we, or would we not have done the same thing in the place of the British? Was it possible they had fired on the French ships without provocation?

Of the four of us—for Alain had followed close on the heels of his daughter—Marie-Anaik was characteristically the first to break out of the fog. Still pale from the shock, her hands locked on the handle of her mallet, she spoke out firmly.

"If the British have done this, it's clear they have

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a reason. What's more, they're going to keep on fighting . . . till they win."

"But, Maman, if they've killed Yves, can you ever forgive them?"

"No!" Marie-Anaik's eyes were tragic. "But all the same, they'd still be right."

Then her shoulders sagged a fraction. "War—it's always hard on the women," she murmured.

That day it did seem doubly hard.

Yet Marie-Anaik's point of view prevailed among the island people, once the first impact of the news had worn away. "The British must have scented an eel under the rocks," they said. Neither Vichy's bitter railings nor the sly condolences of the German soldiers ("That is England—you see now what England does.") could shake their conviction. As Séverin pointed out, the British were no fools; you wouldn't catch them wasting their powder just for the sport of it.

"I've seen them in the ports. They're like us Bretons: they don't pick fights just to be fighting. But when there's trouble in the wind, they go in with their fists, *and they don't give up.*"

Only the Colonel found new fuel for his native anglophobia. He sent off his British war-decorations in an envelope addressed to the "*Former British Ambassador, France,*" and wrote an open letter to the re-

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gional newspaper, stating that France now stood alone, united as one man behind the Victor of Verdun. The German lieutenant in the village marked the article with a red pencil and had it nailed up on a tree outside the *Kommandantur*. Madame la Colonelle went about declaring no punishment was severe enough for the traitors who still favored the cause of the British assassins.

Overnight, half a dozen copies of a colored poster appeared in different parts of the island—one of them pasted on the green door of Amélie's garden. It depicted the smoking ruins of a French town, a haggard French soldier, wounded and in rags, standing in the foreground beside a woman and two ragged children seated on a heap of rubble. Above the figures, in the background, stood a grinning British Tommy and underneath ran the legend: "The British have done this."

"Yes," Annie Prigent's sister said, hugging her bandaged arm, when she came to look at the poster, "that's just the way our town looked, when the Germans got through bombing it."

The following morning, only one poster out of six remained—the one by the *Kommandantur* in the village. The rest had been torn to ribbons. Amélie was nearly frantic when she saw the state of the poster on her door. Had we not been warned that tampering

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with notices would meet with severe and summary punishment? The neighbors had all they could do to keep her from hustling off to the village to vindicate herself. The lighthouse keeper managed to dissuade her, pointing out the posters were—supposedly—the work of French “patriots.” If the Germans punished us for destroying them, it would be tantamount to admitting they had put them there. They wouldn’t have the face, he predicted.

Apparently he was right. The lacerated posters brought no sanctions, though German soldiers said casually it might be worth while to somebody to let them know who the culprits were.

“Oh, I guess it was just the children. You know how crazy children are,” Alain said he told them.

I think it was that day we saw our first British planes since the invasion. They passed out at sea, identified by their long velvety drone. That night we heard others overhead; anti-aircraft guns coughed and barked on the mainland, and louder still, in quick succession, came strings of heavy explosions. Faces next morning were more cheerful than I had seen them for days.

“The Boches on the mainland got a dose of their own pills last night,” Alain said gleefully as he passed on his way to the shore. “Maybe the fellows here will get a taste of them next time.”

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Alice Bozec, who was spreading her sheets on the heather, straightened up to call after him,

"I hope they'll blow us all up, if they get the Germans too."

From then on, planes came often from the north. The big air beacon the Germans had set up across the Narrows stopped whirling its windmill beams across the night sky. We heard their airfields at Brest and St. Brieuc were pitted with craters till they looked like the water-filled *douais* where the island used to steep its flax. Incendiary bombs fired the school the Germans occupied in Tréguier (the local paper reported it as a "mysterious blaze").

Those visits of "allied" planes, as everyone still called them, gave new zest to the Air Ministry's daily reports over the B.B.C. We listened with satisfaction —we were "in the news." "Last night the R.A.F. dropped sticks of bombs on supply dumps and troop concentrations near Lannion." "Did they?" Séverin would chuckle. "Sounded like they dropped them bang on Pors-a-pren." When the broadcasts made no mention of bombings in our region, we concluded the British were not telling all they knew. Letters from friends in the French Channel ports spoke of the "good work done by our neighbors." "Five times in one night we had visitors—we have become the most visited city in France," one man wrote from Cher-

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bourg. "Marvelous landscapers they are, too; the whole water front is a—garden."

Rumor said leaflets had been dropped all along the coast, warning civilians to keep away from docks, troop concentrations and buildings where Germans were quartered. One morning a hoarfrost of leaflets whitened our own heather, vanishing like frost before the sun was high.

All during August the Germans were busy with their preparations for the invasion of Britain. They requisitioned all the motor craft on the coast and all sailboats over fifteen feet long. Across the Narrows, engineers built pontoons and rafts of timber that had been rushed to the entrance of the tidal river. They called in all the life preservers and rubber boots in the region. (When the notice was posted, every rubber boot on the island disappeared overnight. I doubt whether a single pair ever turned up at the *mairie*.) We heard they had commandeered sewing machines, too, and set women on the mainland stitching yards and yards of green tarpaulin. . . .

On the island, the troops rehearsed the invasion daily. On calm mornings, soldiers in full military equipment plus a life preserver crowded into small boats that launches towed in long strings out to sea. They put about after a mile or two and chugged back

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again. Sheltered by a smoke screen, the men plunged overboard in waist-deep water and splashed to shore. They repeated the performance over and over again, like a scene for a movie. Though the summer was warmer than usual, the water on that coast is always cold. The men shivered in their drenched fatigue uniforms of coarse white cotton drill. Emil Heiter told us nearly all his comrades had "the sniffles," and some complained of rheumatism. To Breton eyes, those rehearsals looked singularly puerile. Did the Germans really expect to land like that in Britain?

The soldiers themselves were glum enough on the subject of the invasion. In all their talk I heard not one word of enthusiasm. They no longer bragged about their marvelous weapons—the tanks, the ground mines that explode waist high and scatter three thousand bullets, the thermite bombs that melt concrete and steel; they stopped saying they were going to "wipe out England in three weeks." Comments were gloomy. The generals were "landsmen" who didn't know the sea.

"They don't take it into account, but they won't stop for that. What do they care how much it costs in men?"

In their free time, you saw them wandering along the beaches on the north shore, kicking moodily at the charred bits of wreckage. British ships, no doubt,

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but they seemed to find no grounds for elation in the sight. Soon they too would have to risk crossing the Channel on a ship.

Helmut Müller pointed to the barges that for days moved down the coast, streaked with black and white "night camouflage."

"They're going to pack us on those things like herring—and drown us. After all we've been through. Gloo-gloo." He laughed, but the laughter rang hollow. I gathered that the war dangers he had pictured and experienced never included drowning.

It was as if the realization had suddenly come to the men that when the Juggernauts of mechanized warfare come to the sea, they stop. That the age-old barrier of water had checked their invincible march across Europe, just as in prehistoric days it checked the migration of the banded lemmings. Though the lemmings plunged in, regardless, and perished by millions. They too took the Atlantic for a river. (The soldiers to whom I told it failed to appreciate that story.)

Ashore, the Germans were part of something tremendous—nothing human could stop them. But the sea was not human. On the sea, the cog in the great war machine would become a man again—only a man in a life preserver, on a tossing plank.

It seemed inconceivable to the Bretons that the mere

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fact of the sea should sap the confidence of the Germans. Yet it was apparent to all of us. It gave us our first hint of a possible flaw in the German armor. These soldiers were no cowards. They had proved it. Shock troops with months of fighting behind them—in Poland, Norway, Belgium, and northern France. Some had been in active service since the Anschluss. They were trained to the last detail of efficiency in every phase of modern warfare—on land. The sea represented a totally new element in the war picture. They had not been trained to cope with the unknown.

It was like their terror of guerrilla warfare, that came to the foreground every time they spoke of the campaign in Poland. There had been veritable panic among the troops in Poland, they said. They had crashed through by sheer weight of armament, but they hated to recall it. It had been butchery, not war. Guerrilla warfare was not “regular.” “It made you feel alone,” Emil Heiter told me. They had not been trained to fight alone.

“Our tanks will cross to Britain,” the soldiers said at first.

“Have they got fins?” Alain asked them.

“We’ll take them there on ships.” (After their struggle with tidal currents in the Narrows, no one said “rafts.”)

“Do you know how long it takes to load a ship with

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all that stuff, and unload her afterwards? Think the British will give you dock facilities, cranes and everything?"

"We'll run them aboard on their own power and run them off again—"

"On to what? The harbor?"

Now the men no longer spoke of tanks. They were thinking of themselves and their chances on the hundred miles of water that lay between them and Britain. Every day they practiced swimming, at the beach on the south shore. A waste of time, Alain told them, and quoted the Brittany saying, "Swimming only prolongs dying."

The rumor spread through the island, passed on gleefully from neighbor to neighbor: the Germans were "scared of the sea."

"Haven't they any seamen in Bochie?" Alain asked incredulously. "I haven't seen a man yet who knows how to handle a boat."

It was only too true. One by one, the craft they had requisitioned came to grief, smashed on the rocks during rehearsals. Even the lifeboat went the way of the others. Of all Le Greguer's fleet, a single launch remained seaworthy—the one a French crew ran back and forth between the mainland and the island. Only the tiny fishing boats were left. The owners of the

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wrecked craft stared at the ruins, their faces black with helpless rage.

"If I'd known this was going to happen I'd have fixed her so she'd have gone down with all hands," Séverin stormed when he heard his *Marie-Christine* lay splintered on Roc-ker-varech. "Roc-ker-varech! And the channel there as wide as the roadstead at Brest! If they'd let her drift, she'd have made it herself, the poor old girl!"

We began hearing persistent reports that the Germans were commandeering Breton sailors to take barges down the coast to the "invasion ports." Emil Heiter asked me one day when I thought the Captain might be coming home:

"We'll have a job for him when he gets here."

"Perhaps he won't care to accept it."

Emil's features froze.

"He'll do what we say," he snapped, "or he'll sit in a concentration camp."

"O-ho!" Marie-Anaik laughed, when I translated. "So he thinks he can scare the Captain with that Nazi voice? Tell him he doesn't know Frenchmen!"

For his enlightenment, I informed the soldier there were Frenchmen who would *prefer* a concentration camp rather than—

The Nazi glint left Emil's china-blue eyes.

"*Na, gnä Frau*, don't be cross. . . . But as a friend,

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I advise you—" He dropped his voice. "If you can get word to your husband, better tell him to stay where he is."

(If I could get word— It was late August then. Weeks before, the Germans had cut off communications between occupied France and the rest of the world. No word from the Captain since the belated telegram. But before the wall of silence shut us in, a letter had come for Marie-Anaik from Oran. Yves was safe.)

While I worried what might confront the Captain if he did return, one of our neighbors actually met the test and came off with flying colors. Séverin, the little gnome with sea-weed whiskers, withstood alone the might of the German army.

They came for him one night—a patrol accompanied by a lieutenant. He was to leave at once for the mainland, to join the crew of a barge the Germans were sending up the coast to Cherbourg. I could picture the scene—Séverin, still half asleep, round eyes blinking above the brush of whiskers.

"I think I'll not be going," he said.

The officer explained, argued, threatened—ripped his revolver from its sheath, waved it "like he was flagging a ship," Séverin told me.

"And what did you do then?"

"Oh, I just went on saying the same thing, and

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after a while they got tired and walked off and left me—all but the one, who stayed behind for company.”

For three days Séverin was a prisoner in his house, with a sentry at the door. Then the sentry, too, “walked off and left him.” Perhaps the Germans found a substitute for Séverin. Perhaps they preferred not to create an “incident” among the Bretons, since it appeared they were very partial to Bretons.

Emil Heiter announced one day we were at last to be given our “freedom.” Anne-Elise did not wait for him to finish.

“God be praised—you’re leaving!”

Emil looked vexed. He meant Brittany, he said. Brittany was to be freed from the yoke of France.

“But Brittany *is* France,” Anne-Elise protested, while her mother asked dryly what sort of “yoke” they planned to give us in exchange.

“Autonomous Brittany”—no one took the news seriously. The “autonomists” could scarcely be called a minority; they were little more than a legend: a handful of what Marie-Anaik called “whites”; students here and there, daubing red paint on a statue or chalking *Breiz na tao* on the walls.

Amélie heard in the village that all the population except native Bretons would have to leave. That interested Alain.

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"Monsieur D—— on the point, the Colonel and Madame, all the other 'Gangulars' in the South—"

I reminded him that I, too, was no Breton, nor the Captain, nor Madame Cécile. We would all have to go.

Anne-Elise wanted to know what would happen to Breton girls who married non-Bretons.

"By the time you're ready for that, *ma fille*, we'll have put an end to all this foolish talk," her mother said, "or there won't be a Breton left in Breiz—only our graves."

It did seem only talk. The only concrete evidence we saw of any German attempt to "free" the enslaved Bretons was a newspaper, *l'Heure Bretonne*, piles of which appeared in shops on the mainland—and remained there, unsold.

The next rumor we heard was that the population of the island and the entire coast was to be evacuated, because of the invasion.

The date of the invasion of Britain had originally been set for the first of September, the soldiers said. British ports and coast defenses were first to be destroyed, a strip of shore fifteen miles deep completely razed, and when British airports had been rendered useless and the R.A.F. wiped out, the Germans would enter England "as easy as walking into butter." But from all accounts, the British ports still stood and

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nearly every day we had proof that the R.A.F. was still alive and active. So much so, indeed, that for days no Stukas had roared over us, on their way towards England. It looked as if the German raiders had retreated inland to safer quarters.

September first came—there was no attempt at invasion. Two days later, Emil Heiter announced “it” had been put off until the fifteenth of the month.

“Two more weeks on earth,” he said with a grimace, and pulled a bottle from his pocket. He wanted us to help him celebrate the respite. It was his first gift since the famous bottle of oil. But this time, Marie-Anaik demurred.

“Tell him I know it’s kindly meant, but—well, you might say we’ve lost the taste for wine in all the weeks we’ve been without it. Say, too,” her eyes crinkled, “that being Bretons, these folk they’re aiming to preserve, we don’t choose to drink anything but cider.”

“It isn’t so much that it’s stolen—which I’m sure it is,” she said later. “But what would my Yves and your Captain say, and what would we have said ourselves, a year ago if anyone had told us we’d be drinking champagne with German soldiers . . . on September third, the anniversary of the war!”

September fifteenth came—we never learned exactly what took place on that date. The soldiers, too, were scarcely better informed than we. Had there been an

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attempt at invasion, or only a dress rehearsal? But something dreadful had happened, they said. One rumor spoke of a mutiny among troops embarking at Brest. Another said the R.A.F. had bombed transports at Lorient, Brest and St. Malo. For days, parties scoured the coast at low tide hunting for bodies. From Morlaix and Granville came reports that fishing had been interrupted for ten days because of the corpses washed ashore. As for the number of victims—the figures the soldiers gave varied from ten to fifty thousand. We heard the bodies were burned as soon as found, that many were already half-burned when they came ashore. The story circulated that British planes had sprayed the sea with oil and then dropped fire bombs. We concluded that the bombed barges were oil-burners and that the oil from their tanks took fire.

Rumor no doubt exaggerated the story, but it was clear something disastrous had taken place. The date for the invasion of Britain was again postponed—this time indefinitely. They would not attempt it before spring, the soldiers said, but at the same time they repeated what we had heard them say before: that the war *must* be over by spring, before American supplies had time to arrive.

From then on, their morale, none too buoyant at best, dropped perceptibly. We watched it sink, every day a degree lower. For some it shot down rapidly to

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zero. They took more lonely walks than ever along the shore, or sat for hours on the rocks staring glumly at the Channel. A few even talked of suicide. They had been assured the war would be short—over by Christmas, Hitler had promised. Now it threatened to drag on endlessly. If that were so, why not end things at once with a bullet in the head and have it over? Why wait for the inevitable?

At first, no one took the threat seriously. It was just “soldier talk,” Marie-Anaik said. But soon we heard of suicides among the troops in the port across the Narrows—seven in one week, the soldiers told us—almost an epidemic. It was when the first news of the bombing of German cities leaked through to the troops over the British radio (which they confided they listened to in secret, since their own radio told them nothing) and from reports of men returning from leave in Germany. Goering had promised them no British planes would ever fly over German cities. Goering was a *Schwein*.

None of the soldiers on the island attempted suicide, but the men were depressed and found few distractions. Gorging quantities of food and drinking liters of French wine had lost their novelty. The island girls, with one or two exceptions, avoided them. When the men were allotted back premiums for presence at the front (two thousand francs to every sol-

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dier! ), even that failed to revive their flagging spirits. They were forbidden to send the money home and nothing remained in the shops for them to buy. They began saying the conquered French were better off than German soldiers; many Frenchmen had come home to their families, whereas the Germans had not seen their families for months and who knew when they would see them? They were fed up with the *verfluchter* war. One of them—I think it was Hans the Rheinlander—put the general feeling into words.

“Only ten thousand people at most, in all the world, ever want war—the people high up.”

Our peasant soldiers at Post Number Three had never shown deeper dejection. Yet these were no reservists—they were “professionals” of war, shock troops, the pick and flower of Hitler’s army. The Bretons looked on and listened, nudged each other and exchanged knowing grins. They had only one comment:

“These fellows won’t ever stand a long war. They’ve got no guts.”

The morale of the Bretons was picking up. They had made an important discovery: stripped of its steel, the German mailed fist was only a flesh-and-blood hand after all. A hand less skillful than their own when it came to the sea. And on land—

“*Fi dam Doué*, if we’d only had a little more hard-

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ware, they wouldn't be sitting here today," Alain said confidently.

One day, in the town across the Narrows, I met a French officer friend, a lieutenant-colonel of the *chasseurs alpins* whom I had last seen in Brest. He had fought in Norway and Belgium, escaped at Dunkirk, had been captured on his return to France and was now a prisoner on parole waiting to be transferred. In Brest, he had been skeptical of the military value of German troops. I asked him whether he had changed his mind. In his opinion, had Britain still a chance? Who did he think would win the war?

Colonel R—— gave me an odd smile.

"Men," he said. "The better soldiers. I mean the common soldier and his bayonet. In the last analysis it's always the common soldier who wins wars."

It sounded like a *boutade*. I thought of the tanks, trucks, armored cars and guns we had all seen thundering over the road to Brest. Flesh and blood and a bayonet against that train of steel?

"In the last war, heavy guns on both sides would batter the lines for days, blow the landscape into bits and pit the ground with craters. And yet, when the barrage lifted, the men were there. They crawled out through their holes and went over the top. That was trench warfare, true, but the same applies today. Don't be hypnotized by the machine. Don't think either

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that I minimize its importance. You have to fight planes with planes and tanks with tanks. We couldn't do it. That's why we are—where we are. But mark my words, this is only the first step. What will count in the long run is—what comes after the tanks."

They were only the words of a prisoner, an officer of a defeated army, yet as he spoke them, the glimmer of hope we had nursed for weeks flared up like a beacon. "Don't be hypnotized!" . . . Nazi efficiency might build—momentarily—more machines, better machines. But—and now every Breton knew it—it could not produce better men.

### 13. *Vae Victis*

SUMMER had gone. Had there ever been a summer? We scarcely knew.

"We're like a ship rotting in the harbor," Marie-Anaik said.

Séverin agreed.

"And a ship rots quicker when you leave her a few months at anchor than she does in years at sea."

Ever since August, food conditions had been growing steadily worse. We now had ration cards for bread, meat, sugar, coffee, fats, soap and fuel. But the cards did us little good. With the exception of bread flour, few supplies came to the island. Our "coffee" was roasted barley. No soap or oil had been on sale for months. What sugar we obtained (one pound a month) was in the form of stony cubes of a mysterious substance, vaguely sweet, that blackened the wooden pestle when crushed. We suspected the Germans of taking our good sugar and replacing it with an ersatz.

## *VAE VICTIS*

Meat too was scarce, since butchers were now forbidden to buy sheep and cattle from the farmers. All the livestock had been listed, including rabbits and hens. A farmer's wife had no right to kill a hen without permission from the *Kommandantur*. There was even a shortage of salt. The baker mixed his dough with sea-water and we used sea-water to salt our potatoes and soup.

The German soldiers claimed the British blockade was to blame for the food shortage. No one believed them. We knew where our butter, eggs and potatoes went and who was buying up the sheep and cattle and shipping them out of the region. And while we lacked for food, the soldier's canteen was stocked with good things: jam, coffee, ham, sausage, butter, cheese and eggs. We peered in enviously through the windows, but were not allowed the sight for long—the Germans painted the panes.

The soldiers always claimed their rations were inferior to those of the French army. In theory, it was probably true. They received but one hot meal a day, stew and bread at noon. For breakfast and supper, they ate bread and coffee. However, this was conquered France and the bread was white, while with it went a big chunk of butter and ham or sausage and cheese. What was more, the men had money to buy extra food at their canteen. They were supposed to have

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ration cards (with rations much more generous than ours) for what they bought in the shops and to take their turn in the lines that waited outside for provisions. Yet I never heard of a soldier presenting tickets at a shop and never saw one standing in line. They always walked in ahead and were first served. Who could prevent them?

Like an army of locusts, they had settled down and gone to feeding. Or like potato bugs, people said. We no longer called the Germans Boches, or Fritzes, or Fridolins. They were *doryphores*, the foreign pest that destroys the potato crop. So *doryphore*, like Boche, became a forbidden word, to be punished by fines or prison whenever overheard. (If the offender was a woman, she was generally taken to the cook tent and made to peel potatoes for a day or two. I knew of two such cases.) It was no idle epithet. They had stripped the land to the bone. The shops were empty, the cellars dry. In a rich dairy region, butter, cheese and eggs had become rare, even rarer than they were in the Reich. What still was left to us, they hunted out and devoured.

The owner of the hotel in the village, who succeeded one day in procuring a basket of eggs from a friend on the mainland, told me a soldier saw the eggs arrive and came straightway to order an omelet.

“An omelet of how many eggs?”

“How many eggs in the basket?”

The hotel-keeper counted them.

“Twenty-three.”

“Well, make it twenty-three.”

“And he ate every bit of it, and wiped up the plate with a piece of bread!”

Twenty-three eggs!—when Marie-Anaik had to “steal” two eggs from her own hens for ’Guitte’s boys (her thirty hens were supposed to lay twelve eggs daily for the soldiers).

“No wonder they put on weight. They grow fatter and pinker every day,” Anne-Elise raged. One could not say as much for the islanders or of the French prisoners either. We had forty on the island until the end of September. They were not unkindly treated, but their poor uniforms were in rags and their food was of the meagerest, though we gave them what we could.

The Germans predicted a famine in France for the coming winter.

“You’re going to suffer,” Helmut Müller said once with a certain wry satisfaction. “It’s your turn today. Now you will understand what we went through all these years.”

“But if this keeps on, how do you think France will ever pull herself up again?”

“She never will—that is, she’ll not be what she was

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before. If we let her recover, we'd have another war."

"If you expect to keep France down, you will need to keep a standing army here always."

"There will be an army of course, but not necessarily a big one. We have another plan."

Just what that plan was, I learned from Karl August, the Prussian peasant who told me one day in great excitement that settlers would be sent to Brittany from the bad lands in East Prussia.

"Maybe I'll be back myself. I like the country. It would be fine to have a farm here after the Peace."

"Yes, that's what they mean by 'free Brittany,'" was Marie-Anaik's comment. "But I'd hate to be in the shoes of any German family that tries farming here, peace or no peace, in the years to come. If they think Bretons will ever forget—"

On the island, there was no actual hunger. We all had our own gardens and the sea was there, generous as always. But we soon gave up going to the village for "groceries." Nothing awaited us there but empty shelves or worse, ersatz coffee, ersatz soap and ersatz oil. The latter was a mucilage of boiled lichens, christened "saladette" and "saladine" ("sticky water," the neighbors called it). It bore no relation to oil beyond the mere optical illusion.

But harder to endure than the lack of meat, butter, eggs and groceries, was our sense of isolation. No news

from our men; no hope of mail except letters from rare friends who had not fled south and printed forms, called by courtesy "family postcards," the Germans had at last permitted us to exchange with unoccupied France. Still no word from the Captain since his telegram in June. Already four months. The horizon shut us in like a bell-glass; under it we stifled. As Marie-Anaik said, it wasn't living, it was just "going on."

I envied her routine of daily tasks—the garden, the cows, the kitchen. I too spent hours in the garden, raking and weeding, gathering flower seeds for another year's planting. But the garden needed less and less attention as the season advanced. Growing time was over. The very weeds turned sluggish; soon autumn winds were whipping the flowers to rags. Then rain drove me indoors and with the rain came autumn cold. Time to heap logs in the fireplace. That fireplace—it was the pride of *Cœur à l'Ancre* and older than the house itself. It came from an old manor on the mainland, demolished half a century before. Its massive blocks covered two thirds of the living room wall, its deep hearth could burn four-foot logs. Where were the logs to come from? We had no wood on the island. Since the invasion, no fuel had reached us from the mainland. There were no boats to bring it—nor was there any to bring.

I visited the stone stable that contained my wood-

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pile. Barely half a cartload still left. And with it three sacks of coal. That would have to take me through the winter.

"Better save it for the cold months," Alain advised.

He made off across the lane, to return a few minutes later, trundling a barrow of driftwood.

"Guess you won't make fun of the old man now," he triumphed. "There's enough in the pile for a long spell. When it's used up, we'll go back to burning gorse and ferns—and maybe seaweed. Though the sea hasn't finished sending us wood. I'll cut you a load of heather sods. You'd better start using them. That chimney of yours takes as much stoking as a liner."

He showed me how to bank the fire with mats of heather, cut on the moor—squares of matted roots and earth that glowed and crumbled to white ashes as they burned, giving off a slow, still heat.

When my last gas-tank gave out and I had to abandon the kitchen stove, Marie-Anaik counseled cooking in the chimney.

"It's messier, but you won't risk blowing yourself up any more. You'll only need a kettle for potatoes and soup, and a grill to broil fish on the embers. That's all the cooking any of us will be doing this winter."

So the soup kettle bubbled on the crane, while the splintered planks Alain had salvaged sent up coppery

green flames and the white paint on their surface shriveled and blackened like charred skin.

Those rainy days were endless. For the first time in all the years, the house seemed too big. I had often been alone there before, but never lonely. Now, as Marie-Anaik pointed out, thoughts were no longer good company. They ran in circles—our men, France, the war, our men—an endless chain of unanswerable questions. There could be no answer, only hope. I longed for Cécile and the chess board, though chess was sterile as thinking. I turned to books, less as an evasion than to fill in the empty hours—and discovered there were few books I could bear to read, even for an hour. It was like contacts with friends after the death of someone close to you—only the old ones, friends of all time, stood the test.

Like the pioneers who took two books into the wilderness, I had Shakespeare and the Bible. I read the Bible as I had never read it before, the Old Testament rather than the New. I found somber comfort in its dark pages of turmoil and promise. We, too, were in an Old Testament of blood and tears, still waiting for a Prince of Peace. I reread James Jeans—his *Universe*. It was somehow consoling to imagine a Director of the cosmos who spoke in terms of higher mathematics. I needed a God not made in man's image. I tried the *Divine Comedy* and gave it up after the first few can-

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tos. Why explore another hell? Though there was promise there, too: *Quindi uscimmo a riveder' le stelle.* . . . Stars at the end of the tunnel. When?

One day Marie-Télégramme brought me a postcard to translate, a notice that her eldest son was prisoner somewhere in the Reich. After that there were others. We heard French prisoners, confined at first in France, were being shipped by trainloads into Germany. They wrote their families, begging for warm clothes, soap and food. Food—what could we send them? There was no chocolate, no jam, no canned goods of any sort, no butter. Nothing buthardtack the baker made for us, and sugar, set aside a few lumps at a time from our one-pound rations. Soap—there had been no soap for sale since the invasion. There was no wool. We rummaged in our attics, unraveled yarn from discarded garments and knitted them again into sweaters, stockings and mufflers.

Feeling against the Germans grew steadily more bitter. They had food. The only fuel on the island was theirs. The *garde-champêtre* had to list all the woodburning stoves on the island; the Germans confiscated the best and sent them across to the mainland to be distributed throughout their quarters. We had no right to fuel, or clothes, or shoes or rubber boots. Even wooden sabots had disappeared from the market —the demand was everywhere too great. “Woe to the

conquered"—day by day, we were discovering what it meant.

The Germans sensed the increased hostility. What was more, they resented it.

"You don't seem to know what war is. You don't realize how nice we've been. Why, we could have done here what we did in Poland. You ought to be grateful."

They complained of their isolation.

"Your women run a mile when they see us. The children, too, though you know how fond we are of children. Why don't you like us?"

They concluded the French were a funny people. The French could not admit they were beaten. That accounted for their lack of gratitude.

It was true the Germans had shown themselves strangely tolerant on more than one occasion—perhaps never more so than in the case of Pauline Legall. Pauline had gone upstairs one night, her electric flashlight in her hand, on her way to bed. She still held the flash as she closed her shutters; probably she waved it considerably while doing so. Five minutes later, the patrol was at her door. They banged it with fists and gunbutts.

"Open up! Open up!"

Pauline stood shivering by her bed, too frightened to stir. A crash from below—they were beating in the

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door. She crept to the window, pushed the shutters ajar. The soldiers were just beneath her, raining blows on the panel. Beside herself with terror, she groped for a missile—found the slop jar, picked it up, tilted it . . . There was a splash, a howl, a thundering burst—of laughter.

"They laughed and laughed, like a lot of crazy men," Pauline said with dignity when she related the story. They laughed, they roared, they held their sides. After they burst in the door and all the time they searched the house, they kept on laughing. Pauline almost laughed herself, though she was still stiff with fright—to see them flicking the—well, you can imagine what—off their drenched sleeves. When they finished their search, the soldiers confiscated her flash—and that was all there was to the story. When Pauline called at the *Kommandantur* to complain of the splintered door, she was received with more laughter, though the lieutenant in charge gave her to understand she was lucky to have nothing more to report than a splintered door panel.

The Colonel, too, when he heard the story (it was all over the island by noon) said Pauline could indeed consider herself lucky. I asked him what a French patrol would have done under similar circumstances.

"They would not have laughed," he said grimly and added a few biting comments on the subject of

German "humor." The Colonel had no words of admiration for the German army, those days; not since he learned his son the Captain was a prisoner. But he was as bitter as ever against the English. He kept repeating that France henceforth must stand alone—"alone and hating everybody," Marie-Anaik said he meant: the Germans, the Italians, the British, the European neutrals who waited too long and the Americans who refused their aid. It was a dreary prospect. The Colonel's attitude reminded me vividly of French xenophobia in 1919 when France, though victorious, seemed afflicted with a curious psychology of defeat. At least that was what we called it at the time. I had not realized then what "psychology of defeat" really meant. Now I understood.

The Colonel pinned his faith to the Marshal as a soldier and a man of honor. He dismissed as calumny reports that the Marshal's government was slipping into the German camp. That was unthinkable. A French patriot! France, her fleet, her empire were safe in Pétain's hands.

So spoke the Colonel, himself a soldier, a patriot, an honest man. There were others who thought as he did. Not many—old people with pensions, out of the world for years, unfamiliar with politics, living in the past. "Trust the Victor of Verdun." A few shopkeepers, too, and timid folk like Amélie, who favored

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Vichy because Vichy was the "government." They would always be with the government, whatever its color. "A row of zeros after a numeral," Etienne Bozec used to call them.

There were still others—also few in number—who accepted the Marshal purely as a figurehead. The group behind the old soldier interested them more. Laval, for instance—not Laval personally, to be sure, but what he stood for. Laval, they claimed, was merely being "used" while waiting for a better man. Monsieur D\_\_\_\_\_, our neighbor on the point, belonged to this fraction, the machine-tool manufacturer also, whose big villa overlooks the port. (We heard his factory was already working for the Germans.) These two were "realists," they said, who believed in "making the best of a bad situation . . . since England cannot possibly win." Besides, as the manufacturer pointed out, it was a case of making tools for the Germans or shutting down his plant. But Monsieur l'Avocat who left for Paris to take over the accounts of a big export concern (Jewish), claimed he had but one motive for collaborating with the Germans—his ambition to outwit them. Any Frenchman could outwit a German, if he set his mind to it. Personally, he would prefer fighting; if that younger brother of his were not a prisoner and a potential victim for reprisals,

Monsieur l'Avocat would have joined the Free French in England.

Neither Monsieur l'Avocat, nor the tool-manufacturer, nor our neighbor on the point was of Breton origin. They were "foreigners," Parisians. Whatever reasons they gave—"penny reasons," Marie-Anaik called them—they believed in a German victory and were staking everything on the German card.

There remained the islanders. Aside from the minority that echoed the Colonel's opinions, they formed a solid block. If they excused the Marshal because of his age and past, they felt no tenderness for his associates, the "whites" who had murdered the Republic. In their minds, the Republic was still the people; and the people was France. The "whites" had murdered France. The lighthouse keeper who knew his French Revolution, compared the men in Vichy with the émigrés at Coblenz. They too had made use of foreign aid in their attack on the Republic. Was Vichy with the Germans? *Parbleu*, without the German army, there would be no Vichy. Only the German army could have brought the "whites" to power. The next thing, Vichy would be giving France a king!

There were no longer nuances of color among the neighbors. Farmers, reservists, returned sailors alike, they all said "people" with the accent of the men of 1793. It was the "people" versus the "whites," the

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people versus the "collaborators." Had Etienne Bozec been alive, he would probably have said the men of the Fleet—now that their future was jeopardized—had at last remembered the Republic. I heard pious hopes that German troops would invade entire France. "Then everyone will understand what 'collaboration' means."

*Vive la République et la victoire de l'Angleterre!* Ninety per cent of the island population adopted the slogan. The only hope for France lay in the victory of democratic Britain. What if Britain had "led France by the nose," as the Colonel maintained—she had never drained and despoiled her as the Germans were doing. She never spoke of "keeping Paris" or slashing the map of France to ribbons. Then, too, the British were people a Breton could respect. The British were like the Bretons: they knew the sea.

When November came, the population on the north shore of the island breathed a sigh of relief. "Our" German soldiers left the island. When even intensive drilling failed to stiffen the sagging morale of the troops, their chiefs apparently decided the time had come to adopt measures more drastic. In any case, whatever the underlying reason, they ordered the soldiers back to Germany. They were to be given a long leave, the men told us, their faces alight at the thought of being home for Christmas. After that, they would

be sent to the Eastern Front, to Bulgaria, they said. (Bulgaria? Didn't they mean Roumania, I asked. No, Bulgaria, they insisted.) But that was still in the future. For the present, it sufficed that they were leaving Brittany—Brittany and the sea and the invasion of England that other soldiers than they would now have to experience. For of course the invasion would take place as planned—wasn't it scheduled for spring?—and Britain would be crushed. In the meantime, they were going home; after that, to Bulgaria. And if they had to fight in Bulgaria, at least they would be fighting on—land.

Emil Heiter brought a delegation to pay a parting call and thank us for the "*schöne Stunden*." Marie-Anaik was touched in spite of herself.

"Poor lads, maybe they won't have many 'happy hours' ahead of them. After all, they're only human—But no," she corrected, with a decided shake of the head, "I guess they're just half-human now. They'll have to learn a new way of living before we can think of them as people like ourselves."

So the soldiers left; and to replace them came others. Older non-coms and boy troopers—the majority looked like new recruits, noisier, less disciplined, scornful of the "natives." This was the Hitler youth of whom Helmut Müller had said once, "They've never known anything but New Germany, so they

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think everything's fine." (He had been telling how people of his generation who remembered "other days" sometimes felt—oh, just a bit uncomfortable. He hastened to add it was merely a question of adjustment.)

With the arrival of the young soldiers, the period of what Séverin termed "choking us with their gloves on" ended. No more cordial salutations on the road, no more carrying of heavy baskets. The first real looting started. Vacant houses were stripped of everything transportable: radios, clocks, bedding, clothing, pictures, even small articles of furniture. The soldiers climbed over walls and through windows, burst in doors. You met them in broad daylight, lugging heavy bundles tied up in sheets. People who lodged complaints at the *Kommandantur* met with scant courtesy. There too the officers had been changed.

There was no longer any need to puzzle one's head over the German "paradox," contrast the behavior of individual German soldiers with the Nazi policy towards France. From now on, policy and men were one. The islanders crawled into their shells.

"No matter if a regiment comes into the court, I'll not send for you to come and translate," Marie-Anaik assured me.

In the meantime the island was on the "honor roll," as we said. One of our two sea captains had taken his

ship to England with all her crew. And a Navy commander from the port across the Narrows had slipped out with his destroyer to join the allied fleet. When a Vichy court-martial sentenced the two officers as traitors, ordered their property confiscated and condemned them to death by default, indignation ran high.

"There will be other death sentences for 'traitors' before these are carried out," people prophesied.

The Colonel, while he "deplored the fact" of their evasion, refused to consider the officers as traitors. He spoke of them as hot-headed youngsters, misguided patriots whose "juvenile ardor" had caused them to forget a soldier's first duty is to obey orders. He even went so far as to admit he might have been tempted to follow their example—in his own impetuous youth.

"I'll bet your Captain has done it, too," Alain told me confidently.

Still the Captain gave no sign. Here and there, news had begun to filter through to families on the island. Smuggled letters crossed the line; or it might be an unsigned note, mailed somewhere in occupied France. Soldiers and sailors, repatriated from Syria and Egypt, forwarded messages to families of comrades who remained behind. Surely the Captain could have found some roundabout channel through which to send word.

"It's of you he's thinking," Marie-Anaik decided.

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"He doesn't know how things are here. If he's where we suppose he is, he's keeping it dark for fear of what might happen to you. Well, if that day comes, don't fear—we'll all look after you. Though I don't imagine they'll start reprisals around here, not so long as the British hold out. If they did, there *would* be a revolution."

I tried to find comfort in what she said, but still I worried. The silence that wrapped us in, even the silence of the house grew daily more oppressive. The clock—I had never been aware of its asthmatic ticking except at night—now made itself heard in broad day. Its husky voice, the sputter of the fire, the gurgle of a cistern pipe—were there any other sounds in the world? Out of doors, even the sky was sealed over. Day after day it rained. The autumn damp crept to the very hearth where Alain's fire, fed parsimoniously and banked with sods, filled not a third of the big chimney and warmed little more than the imagination. Huddled in the Captain's chair, with the sweater I was knitting spread on my knees for warmth, I tried not to think of the months to come. Months, it might even be years—

Yet I had Marie-Anaik. A dozen times a day I thanked Providence she existed. Whenever she crossed the threshold, mallet in hand, beads of rain clinging to her hair and her rough coat, the very sight of her was

a tonic. Her cheerfulness made me ashamed of my own persistent gloom. She had stopped worrying for France, she said, since "worrying won't drive out one German, nor free a Frenchman." She had no personal grounds for being downhearted, not with Yves safe at Oran and Auguste at Dakar. René—well, naturally, she was thankful René had come through it all without a scratch, but she couldn't help feeling relieved when he took his tugs and his family back to Le Havre. René had changed—oh, a good husband and father he still was, though limp as a dishrag in the hands of that mother-in-law. "But you know how men are."

Only one thing distressed her—she missed her horizon-blue soldiers, the big family she had mothered the winter before. Gonidec, the Corporal, Hervé, Cornec—where were they now? Back on their farms, she hoped, though one couldn't be too sure, since we had heard poor Firmin was a prisoner. Yes, poor Firmin, slaving now for the Germans. He would always be slaving for someone wherever he was. But the Germans would make a mistake if they thought all France was like that—a nation of Firmins.

I asked her once if she did not think she had done considerable "slaving" herself, throughout the years. She eyed me thoughtfully.

"I guess I've driven myself, if that's what you

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mean. Maybe you think I've driven others too?" She broke off with a laugh. "Well, I suppose I have—men and cows, that is to say one man and two or three cows. I've often wished there were more of both. Alain says anyone as fond of bossing folks ought to keep a hotel. But people in a hotel would always be moving on. I'd like them to stay put. Maybe I'd be better on a ship; then they couldn't get away from me. Don't you think I would make a good sea-captain?"

Did I? It was one of the truest things she ever said.

It was already late November when I first began worrying about Marie-Anaik. In the beginning, it could scarcely be called a worry—nothing more than from time to time an ill-defined feeling that something was amiss. Did I fancy it, or was her step less assured, her laugh less spontaneous? I caught myself wondering—had the strain of the past months tried her strength more than she would admit? Her life had never been easy; she was no longer young. Could it be fatigue? When I taxed her with it, she protested vigorously. No, she was not tired, not tired at all. Then she must be hiding something. "Now what would I have to hide?" she countered. And briskly—"Let's talk of something besides me."

For all her denials, I could not shake off the impression there was a shadow somewhere. . . . It was in-

tangible as a shadow, but it existed. I could almost feel it gaining. There were days when she betrayed a curious impatience—not with people, but with things. Things that slipped and upset and rolled away and tumbled from shelves and hooks.

"I declare, that crane has flown up the chimney," she scolded when I found her balancing the soup kettle on the edge of the hearth as she groped in the dark fireplace. "There—I've upset the half of it!"

I rescued the kettle and hung it on the hook above the fire while Marie-Anaik changed her dripping apron.

"Drenched to the bone and it's the second time this morning! Everything I touch seems possessed. The house must be full of *korriganes*."

Was it the *korriganes* that interfered with her knitting?

"Maman, you've got the heel all crooked," Anne-Elise would say.

"Why, so I have. I can't think what's come over me," her mother would reply—and rip would go the yarn. Again and again it happened. "It must be rheumatism that makes my fingers so stiff."

At last she gave up knitting socks for mufflers.

"I can't go wrong now, even if my fingers *are* like oars—"

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"But, Maman, you dropped two stitches in the last row. And here's another big hole."

"Pest take the thing—" Marie-Anaik rolled her knitting into a ball and tossed it to her daughter. "Suppose you finish it. I'm tired of knitting anyhow."

After that, she knitted no more in the evenings. She merely sat, erect in the chair by the hearth, her hands idle in her lap. I was content to see her rest but could not resist asking again—was she sure she was not ill? She gave an impatient *t-t-k*. Of course she was not ill.

"Can't I be a lady too?"

She forced a laugh—it was as unlike her as the remark.

One afternoon we sat together on the low stone wall beside the hillock, watching the cows crop the grass that bordered the lane. It was a still autumn day, almost warm, with the sea stirring gently beyond the rocks and the gorse on the moor yellow with its second blossoming. As we sat there, two planes rose into the sky from behind the Semaphore hill, white as gulls against the low-hanging clouds.

"They must be hospital planes," I said. "Yes, there's the red cross."

Marie-Anaik squinted at the sky.

"I wish they'd fly lower, so we could see them close. They must be pretty."

I stared at her, aghast.

"But they were flying low—"

A little flush crept up her cheek and she looked away.

"They—they did make a racket, didn't they?" she said shakily. I caught her hand.

"Marie-Anaik, can't you—*see*?"

She gave me a little push and freed her hand.

"Of course I can see . . . light and dark and shapes. My time hasn't come yet."

So that was Marie-Anaik's secret. She had kept it jealously from all of us. She excused herself: "It's just my own trouble. You've all got yours." She had known it was coming—oh, months ago, when things first began dimming out. She understood what it meant. Her mother had been like that ten years before she died . . . cataracts on both eyes. You see, in those days, there was nothing you could do.

"I used to think I'd never stand it, if it came to me. But I guess it's like everything else—it's only the thinking beforehand that's hard. You can bear almost anything when it comes."

But surely she need not bear it. I broke in to ask her: had she not heard how easy such things were? An operation—

"I know. I was planning, when my time came. . . . There used to be a good doctor on the mainland: he was mobilized with the others. And now, with the

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defeat and everything—" she gave a hopeless shrug.

I understood what she meant. The money . . .

"We haven't much. We don't know what's ahead. Maybe Auguste and Yves will be coming home. They're young; they have to live. I've had my life. I wouldn't feel I had the right—"

I thought of the Captain, Cécile, other friends who might have helped. Where were they? Somewhere beyond the wall that shut us in. We were prisoners on a desert island—I realized as never before, all that it could mean.

"Marie-Anaik, there *must* be a way—"

She nodded vaguely.

"Maybe—in time. I can wait; we're all waiting now. I've got a few months anyhow before . . . I'll be like the lighthouse there."

If she had not laughed, I could have borne it. But the image of the darkened beacon, the sense of our helplessness and on top of it all, that familiar laugh as she swung over the wheel of her bark and headed it bravely into the shadow—

"Now if that isn't downright foolish," she scolded. "Just as though you didn't have enough already to irk you, worrying your heart out for the good Captain. I declare I'd give my two eyes right now to have him here, safe and hearty." She patted my cheek. "And now—I must be changing the cows."

I HAVE never been able to grasp a continent. When I say "Europe," it is like saying so many light-years, so many billions of dollars. The figures are there, but the dimensions escape me. Europe—or, for that matter, France, or even Paris—is to me a street here and there, a room, a face—so many faces that at last I am lost.

It may be a woman's way of looking at the world—gathering details, patches, pebbles, like a magpie thieving odds and ends that glitter. But surely penny-wisdom does not always imply pound-foolishness. Quilts are made of patches and roads of pebbles; a penny a day—or a dollar (the thrift-unit has grown with the century)—may swell eventually to a bank account. At least that is what we have been taught to believe.

One of the first things I learned as a student in France was: every pebble is important, though not in

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itself. The detail presupposes the pattern; the dollar—well, if there is no pattern for the dollar, you have waste, which is a French word for anarchy, chaos. So the “woman’s way” of looking at things may be a French characteristic, after all.

The island was my dollar. A rock in the Channel, where the peninsula of Balkanized Europe narrows to a point: Finis-terre, land’s end, or land’s beginning—it all depends on the way you look at it. The island presupposed the hinterland. It *was* the hinterland—its mirror, essence and microcosm. When I think: France, I see the island—southern palms and northern rocks, ports, metropolis, farmlands. Here were dimensions I could grasp. Its people: towndwellers, farmers, seafarers, soldiers, leisured few. . . . To me they all had names. Alain, Séverin, Etienne, Gonidec, Hervé, the Colonel. And Amélie, Alice, Marie-Anaik—Marie-Anaik, the dearest name of all. The island’s children, hers in peace and war and defeat and desperate, unalterable hope. . . .

For years, I had been their friend and neighbor. I could even say I belonged to the island, because of a ship’s captain and an old granite house on the edge of the moor. *Cœur à l’Ancre*—it too was my dollar, my insurance against old age and chaos. “My” house?

## ROCK OF FRANCE

The House where no one dies—I was only a life tenant. And perhaps not even that. . . .

The fact came home to me when I was given my chance to leave the island, the day I was rescued or banished—I am not certain which. Perhaps both. Only time can tell. I owed my chance of escape to the accident of being born west of the Atlantic, so far away that rescue came like the intervention of a *deus ex machina*—the Hand of Providence, Marie-Télégramme called it, when she brought me the long envelop containing my ticket to freedom. Marie-Anaik said a trifle sadly that, whoever was behind it, it no doubt had to be. She added Providence might have gone about things in a less roundabout way: couldn't "it" find some means of giving me news of the Captain without forcing me to cross the Atlantic? As yet I had only the promise—after six months of silence, at the end of the journey, I would find news waiting.

So there was I, like many an emigrant before me, with my ticket in my hand and the gate of escape unexpectedly ajar. A narrow gate—barely room for a fugitive to squeeze through, with thirty pounds of baggage.

I think it is a healthy experience for anyone, to be obliged at least once in his life to strip his belongings to essentials. To discover something of the feeling of nakedness that must come with dying. To stand as I

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did, in the midst of things that have made up a life-time and say: of all this, I can take with me—thirty pounds. I am no longer amazed at the strange and seemingly futile objects people save with their lives from fire and flood. For I discovered then that the things of value to me had no value in themselves, or to anyone else. Each of the silly treasures I carried away in my emigrant's baggage stood for something, but that something could not be reckoned in money.

What was closest and dearest of all the island had given me—Marie-Anaik and the House—I could not take with me. I could take a rose, the last November rose, from the rambler over the door and more precious still, Marie-Anaik's tearful but confident:

“You'll be meeting the Captain out there; I feel it. One day, you'll be coming home. It's only then I'll be wanting my eyes again—to see you both and the new France that's coming.”

In the narrow door to freedom, there was room for me, my thirty pounds of baggage and one thing more: a tenuous, shadowy anchor-chain.

*New York-Medomak  
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